

## The reading of Jeremiah 4:22-28

<sup>22</sup> “*For my people are foolish,*  
they do not know me;  
they are stupid children,  
they have no understanding.

They are skilled in doing evil,  
but do not know how to do good.”

<sup>23</sup> I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void;  
and to the heavens, and they had no light.

<sup>24</sup> I looked on the mountains, and lo, they were quaking,  
and all the hills moved to and fro.

<sup>25</sup> I looked, and lo, there was no one at all,  
and all the birds of the air had fled.

<sup>26</sup> I looked, and lo, the fruitful land was a desert,  
and all its cities were laid in ruins  
before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

<sup>27</sup> For thus says the LORD: The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make  
a full end.

<sup>28</sup> Because of this the earth shall mourn,  
and the heavens above grow black;  
for I have spoken, I have purposed;  
I have not relented nor will I turn back.

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**My People are Foolish – Meditation – Kerra**

God gets angry. We seem to have forgotten that, or at least have it swept it under the rug for now. It's an attribute we'd rather God not have for sure. We prefer our god nice, a pushover really. It makes us uncomfortable to think about the "Angry God of the Old Testament." We usually say it that way, don't we? As if God changed. As if God went to a court-mandated anger management class and isn't like that anymore. As if God has forgiven us already, so we can act however we want to now.

It's has become a peculiarly Christian problem. We've made Jesus into somebody nice – rather than read our Bibles and discover that he wasn't all that nice, and he routinely broke the rules. He was radically committed to a way of love and justice that made people hate him and ultimately got him killed. *But Jesus only gets mad if you swear, or dance, or play cards.* Well, maybe old timey Baptist Jesus. How today's media portrays Christian anger isn't much better than that. It becomes newsworthy only when it's covered in bigotry, hypocrisy, and nit-picky self-righteousness. It's about who gets to have wedding cakes and which lives are protected as valuable, which means it's also about which lives are not. It's not a very satisfying picture of anger if you ask me.

Now THIS picture of God's anger in Jeremiah is amazing, revelatory really. It's about holy rage, the kind that turns up the heat, and should make us start to sweat. If you can get past God calling people foolish and stupid, there's a lot of important stuff happening here. We, the people, are called foolish for a reason: *we do not know God.* We are called stupid for a reason: *we have*

*no understanding*. God is ticked off because human beings have become SKILLED at doing evil and *don't know how* to do good. YES. This is what makes a good God lose it. When this is what people have turned into, the earth, the heavens, the cities, the creatures all feel the loss and the pain of it. The earth shall mourn. The heavens shall turn black. It's gonna be bleak. So what exactly gets God's anger to this boiling point?

## The Reading of Jeremiah 5:1, 7-9, 20-29; and 9:4-9

### Jeremiah 5

5 Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem,

look around and take note!

Search its squares and see

if you can find one person

who acts justly

and seeks truth—

so that I may pardon Jerusalem.<sup>[a]</sup>

7 How can I pardon you?

Your children have forsaken me,

and have sworn by those who are no gods.

When I fed them to the full,

they committed adultery

and trooped to the houses of prostitutes.

8 They were well-fed lusty stallions,

each neighing for his neighbor's wife.

9 Shall I not punish them for these things?

says the LORD;

and *shall I not bring retribution*

*on a nation such as this?*

20 Declare this in the house of Jacob,

proclaim it in Judah:

21 Hear this, O foolish and senseless people,

who have eyes, but do not see,

who have ears, but do not hear.

22 Do you not fear me? says the LORD;

Do you not tremble before me?

I placed the sand as a boundary for the sea,

a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass;  
though the waves toss, they cannot prevail,  
though they roar, they cannot pass over it.  
23 But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart;  
they have turned aside and gone away.  
24 They do not say in their hearts,  
“Let us fear the LORD our God,  
who gives the rain in its season,  
the autumn rain and the spring rain,  
and keeps for us  
the weeks appointed for the harvest.”  
25 Your iniquities have turned these away,  
and your sins have deprived you of good.  
26 For scoundrels are found among my people;  
they take over the goods of others.  
Like fowlers they set a trap,<sup>[d]</sup>  
they catch human beings.  
27 Like a cage full of birds,  
their houses are full of treachery;  
therefore they have become great and rich,  
28 they have grown fat and sleek.  
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness;  
they do not judge with justice  
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,  
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.  
29 Shall I not punish them for these things?  
says the LORD,  
*and shall I not bring retribution  
on a nation such as this?*

### **Jeremiah 9:4-9**

<sup>4</sup> Beware of your neighbors,  
and put no trust in any of your kin;<sup>[a]</sup>  
for all your kin<sup>[b]</sup> are supplanters,  
and every neighbor goes around like a slanderer.

<sup>5</sup> They all deceive their neighbors,  
and no one speaks the truth;  
they have taught their tongues to speak lies;  
they commit iniquity and are too weary to repent.<sup>[c]</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Oppression upon oppression, deceit<sup>[d]</sup> upon deceit!  
They refuse to know me, says the Lord.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts:  
I will now refine and test them,  
for what else can I do with my sinful people?<sup>[e]</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Their tongue is a deadly arrow;  
it speaks deceit through the mouth.  
They all speak friendly words to their neighbors,  
but inwardly are planning to lay an ambush.

<sup>9</sup> Shall I not punish them for these things? says the Lord;  
*and shall I not bring retribution  
on a nation such as this?*

## **A Nation Such as This – Meditation – Kerra**

Jeremiah describes EXACTLY what will set God into such a rage. Can you find even one person who acts justly and seeks the truth? Apparently not. Three times, there are descriptions of how the nation has lost its way, and three times, God asks the same questions at the end, “Shall I not punish them for these things? Shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?” Best rhetorical questions ever. The anticipated audience – when hearing these presumably accurate descriptions of who they’ve become – has to reckon with the fact that they deserve EVERYTHING they’ve got coming to them. Ain’t no angry judgment like God’s angry judgment!

So, let’s look at what gets described in these three accounts of “the nation such as this?”

- 1) In the first account we come up against this metaphor Jeremiah uses that the nation resembles dysfunctional family relationships. The children have forsaken God, and gone after false gods. And then it flips back to the metaphor that shows up in Jeremiah that the nation is also like a cheating spouse. *I fed them until they were full, they still committed adultery. These well-fed lusty stallions still neigh after their neighbor’s wife.* This, my friends, is less about lust for sex than it is about lust for power and possession. But lust it is all the same. God has given them everything they need for life, and they want more. They crave it. They have to have it. They simply aren’t satisfied with what God has done for them. They are consumed with greed for power. And they are fine with making deals and exploiting people in order to achieve that power. Does that nation deserve punishment?

- 2) In the second account, the nation is ignoring God's boundaries, the limitations that God has put on being human. They have eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear. They have been given the greatest gift of all, life, but they show no gratitude. These scoundrels, as God calls them, have become fat and rich, with houses full of treachery. Why? They know no limits when it comes to deeds and wickedness. Entitlement has gotten to the nation such as this. Rather than view life as a gift to be shared and cared for compassionately, God is angry that they no longer judge with justice or take care of the needy. It's every person for him- or herself. Does that nation deserve punishment?
- 3) In the final account, the message is not as clouded with metaphor, it's crystal clear. We find out that oppression and deceit make God livid. In this nation, they speak friendly to their neighbors, but prepare to wait in ambush. No one speaks the truth. They are so caught up in their lies and sin that they are too weary to make any changes. Apathy gives way to any desire for change. Does that nation deserve punishment?

We've got a pretty clear picture here of God's argument for smiting the nation to smithereens. Anything else? Oh yeah – next we find out that the people couldn't care less. They remain completely untouched by God's anger, and incapable of their own shame.

## **The Reading of Jeremiah 6:13-15; 8:11-12**

### **Jeremiah 6:13-15**

<sup>13</sup> For from the least to the greatest of them,

everyone is greedy for unjust gain;

and from prophet to priest,

everyone deals falsely.

<sup>14</sup> They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,

saying, "Peace, peace,"

when there is no peace.

<sup>15</sup> They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;

yet they were not ashamed,

*they did not know how to blush.*

Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;

at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,  
says the LORD.

### **Jeremiah 8:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> They have treated the wound of my people carelessly,

saying, "Peace, peace,"

when there is no peace.

<sup>12</sup> They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;

yet they were not at all ashamed,

*they did not know how to blush.*

Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;

at the time when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,  
says the LORD.

## **They Did Not Know How to Blush – Meditation - Kerra**

*They did not know how to blush.* This line is so insightful, so dead on, that it seems amazing to me that ancient people “got” what we fail to get in our enlightened, modern society. Jeremiah realizes that, not only have the people fallen into patterns of hurtful, awful, soul-crushing behavior – they’ve hidden it so deep that they don’t even blush when they see it.

Oh wow. They can’t even see why God is angry. Everyone is greedy for unjust gain. Everyone is dealing falsely. The wounds of this society are not even being recognized. They are just getting deeper and more painful. They have no shame. And seem to not even know it’s coming when they fall, and are punished, and are overthrown.

This insight really makes me wonder. There are a whole lot of things I could point out that SHOULD be making me blush, making us blush as Christians or as Americans – and yet we go on as if all is OK. Sometimes that’s protective. It’s not fruitful to be debilitated by shame, but to not have a healthy understanding of why we need guilt and shame is also problematic. We need to be able to blush – to be embarrassed when we are individually caught in falsehood, or are able to gain only at someone else’s expense. But what we really need is a sense of collective shame, the kind that can only be healed by moving forward in different ways. Though we have come a long distance from our slave-holding past – we aren’t there yet in terms of racial equality. Though we have come a long distance from an agreed upon patriarchal society – we need to recognize our common humanity that frees men and women, that frees all genders expressions to be themselves without retribution. Unjust gain is still an ongoing problem – and contextually one that seems to be getting worse, not better.

In order to change and grow as a society, as a culture, as a nation – sometimes we need to feel the weight of God’s anger, and have the gnawing feeling inside that if we don’t change, a really bad turn could be just around the corner – and we would only have ourselves to blame for getting it wrong – repeatedly.

There’s a non-theological word that has deep theological implications at this turn in the Jeremiah narrative. That word is “nevertheless.” God is angry. The nation has acted atrociously. The people have yet to be remorseful. **NEVERTHELESS** – God is faithful and compassionate. That nevertheless is the essence of grace, the wideness of God’s mercy, the jolt we need to make a real difference. To be foolish enough to imagine that the brokenness of the world can be changed for the better.

## The Reading of Jeremiah 7:1-7

Jeremiah 7:1-7

7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup>Stand in the gate of the LORD's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. <sup>3</sup>Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you<sup>[a]</sup> in this place. <sup>4</sup>Do not trust in these deceptive words: "This is<sup>[b]</sup> the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD."

<sup>5</sup>For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, <sup>6</sup>if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, <sup>7</sup>then *I will dwell with you in this place*, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever.

## **I Will Dwell with You in This Place – Meditation – Kerra**

Even before the people acknowledge the mess they've made, God is right there with the tools to help them clean it up. Clean it up. Amend your ways and your doings. Act justly with one another. It is the ONLY option. Don't oppress the alien, the orphan, the widow. WOW. Don't step on the backs of the vulnerable to get what you want. It meant something then. It still means something now. It's scary how much the Bible still reads us, if we will truly read it. No more innocent blood. No more fake gods that make false promises to yield us power and fill our bank accounts but do nothing to touch our hearts.

THIS GOD. Our God. The Lord promises the same promise here and now that was promised in the time of Jeremiah. I know because it's one of those spiritual truths that comes back and back and back if you let it. *You be my people. I'll be your God.* End of story. And not only does God promise to be God out in the universe somewhere. God promises to live with us, to dwell in our communities, to move right in next door and be in our face with what it means to be the beloved community. Ownership of the land back then shifted and changed. Though God promised deliverance to a "new land" – fast forward a few generations and Israel and Judah keep getting walloped by bigger powers. And when that happened, a new power in place typically meant that you had to take on new gods. But God says "no" – the protection and love of the divine doesn't change even though the circumstances swirling around you may be changing all the time. We need to embrace this truth for our own time, for there are those proclaiming false gods all around us with names that are exactly the same as the names we use.

If Jesus seems to be too nice and worried only about HIS followers' happiness, then go back and re-read all those stories that led to his crucifixion. If the god being proclaimed in the public

square has no room for the aliens, orphans, and widows, and doesn't seem at all concerned about what keeps happening to the immigrants, the impoverished, the oppressed and the vulnerable, then you aren't looking at our God who will take us to task when we overlook even the most remote corner of the beloved community. If the spirit preached isn't capable of being angry at the atrocities of the world, it most certainly isn't the Holy Spirit. It's time to rekindle what it means to have holy anger, and use that anger for change. When our anger becomes shared with God's anger, the power to heal and renew will be unstoppable, and God will be side by side with us. Amen.