

Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

Do the Right Thing

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 72:1-17
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 22
PRINT PASSAGE: Jeremiah 22:1-10

Key Verse— Do not wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3b, KJV)

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“Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” (Jeremiah 22:3b, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand that the covenant relationship between God and God's people requires justice.
- Repent for injustice and seek to deliver the oppressed.
- Become active agents of deliverance for the oppressed.

*Key Terms

Forsaken (verse 9)—Hebrew: *'azab* (ä•zav'): had left, refused, departed from, left behind.

Gilead (verse 6)—Hebrew: *Gilad* (ghil-awd'): a region east of the Jordan (in Palestine); also, the name of several Israelites.

Judah (verse 1)—Hebrew: *Yehudah* (yeh-hoo-daw'): a son of Jacob's; also, his descendants; the southern kingdom.

Orphan (verse 3)—Hebrew: *yathom* (yaw-thome'): someone who is without parents (or is “fatherless” [KJV/NIV]).

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Life Happens

Keisha and her in-laws do not get along. When Keisha married Alex (her high school sweetheart), she thought that her husband's family would come to like her as time went on. In Keisha's mind, she was hoping that they could see how much she loves their son.

While scrolling through Facebook, Keisha saw a derogatory post about her from her mother-in-law. Aghast, she called Alex immediately and asked him to have a talk with his parents. Alex's talk went something like, “Mom. Dad . . . Keisha is my life partner, and I love her. I need for you to respect her



Overview

Jeremiah 22 is a continuation of Jeremiah's declarations of surrender and repentance prophesied to Judah. However, this chapter is not in order; it jumps from King Josiah to King Jehoiakim. This time, Jeremiah is used by God to speak to the leaders and kings of Judah. Their behavior was irresponsible, weak, and ungodly. Following King Josiah, who was a man of faith, their behavior was unacceptable to God. King Josiah tried to reform the nation after reading and studying the covenant of God. But after a few years of leadership, King Josiah was killed. He had agreed to assist the Assyrians in battle with Babylon and was killed during the Battle of Megiddo in 609 BC. The nation was heartbroken over his death.

even if you don't like her. Eventually, Keisha will be the mother of my children and your grandchildren. So, I will not stand for and tolerate this negative behavior. I love you as your son but know that I love my wife more."

Keisha is dedicated to building a life with Alex and understands that his parents are a package deal. She is willing to go the extra mile to improve their relationship. Over time, she hopes that her in-laws will meet her a part of the way.

Questions

1. Please share a time or situation where you had to do the right thing.
2. How did you prepare yourself to take the high road? From your experience, what advice can you share with others?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

A Face-to-face Warning (Jeremiah 22:1-4)

KJV


THUS SAITH the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of *Judah*, and speak there this word,
2 And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates:
3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the *fatherless*, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.
4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.

NIV

THIS IS what the LORD says: "Go down to the palace of the king of *Judah* and proclaim this message there:
2 "'Hear the word of the LORD to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.
3 "'This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the *fatherless* or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.
4 "'For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people.'"

In this outline, God continued to speak through Jeremiah. This time, Jeremiah was instructed to go straight to the top to prophesy to the king. Jeremiah had to have the power and protection of God with him because other prophets in the past were put to death just for entering the king's palace to prophesy. Jeremiah, full of the power of God, fierce and solid as a rock, in the faith of God went to the palace of the king of Judah to proclaim the message the Lord gave to him (**verse 1**). Jeremiah spoke to the leaders of Judah, face-to-face, to show them how serious the matter was going to be if they did not repent or surrender. He called them out by the positions they held and was specific about how the people were being mistreated and violated (**verses 2-3**). Jeremiah said, "This is what the Lord says" Leaders were to administer justice and righteousness to all. God charged them to take care of the oppressed and lead them from their oppressors. They were to do right by the love of God and do no violence toward anyone. We should never forget the fatherless or the widow, for they have a special place in God's heart. Additionally, no responsible citizen in any community should shed innocent blood. This could refer to Jeremiah 20:20-23, when the prophet was put to death for prophesying the same as Jeremiah—or to Jeremiah 7:31, when innocent infants were sacrificed in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom at Topheth.

In **verse 4**, Jeremiah, still in the palace, spoke to the leaders in hopes of getting through to them. He continued to preach repentance and obedience. In addition, Jeremiah told them that if they turned from their evil ways then God would forgive them of their sins. He demanded that they administer justice immediately and remember their duties as leaders to the people. It was their duty to be fair with judgment and uphold righteousness on all levels of the government.

 **What Do You Think?** We can all identify oppression in our community. Brainstorm different ideas to address the oppressed and bring them closer to deliverance.

God Makes a Promise to Himself (*Jeremiah 22:5-7*)

KJV

5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.

6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art *Gilead* unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.

7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

NIV


5 "But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin."

6 For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah: "Though you are like *Gilead* to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a wasteland, like towns not inhabited.

7 "I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire."

Jeremiah continued his prophecy in this outline. The leaders thought that because of who they were, God would not chastise them. However, God was tired of all the injustice taking place in His nation. There was so much idolatry and violence in the land that God had to do something to get their attention. They were going to reap what they had sown. The Israelites had broken the covenant they made with God. Furthermore, they wanted God to continue blessing them while they were steeped in their sin. God made a promise to Himself that He would punish them and correct the actions and inactions of the leaders if they did not obey the words He gave to His prophet Jeremiah to deliver. In addition, God also made a promise to destroy the palace in which the king resided (**verse 5**). God acknowledged His affinity for Judah once again and expressed how valuable Judah was to Him. He viewed them as a special healing place (Gilead, a famous place for balm, myrrh, spices, and other healing agents). Lebanon was the highest mountain in Judah, filled with beautiful, tall red cedar trees. God promised He would make it unrecognizable like a wilderness (**verse 6**).

The Babylonians were coming to destroy them. The army sent by God was trained and armed with weapons, with Him on their side. The Babylonian army was on a mission to desecrate their palace and the Temple—which was built with fine cedar—and burn Jerusalem to the ground (**verse 7**)! Promises are meant to be kept, and especially when made by God. God wants to bless us, not destroy us. We must remember to take heed to His holy Word.

 **What Do You Think?** We have all done wrong a time or two in our lives. How did God's punishment and/or chastisement impact your life?

Retributive Justice (*Jeremiah 22:8-10*)

KJV

8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city?

9 Then they shall answer, Because they have *forsaken* the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

NIV

8 “People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, ‘Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?’


9 “And the answer will be: ‘Because they have *forsaken* the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.’”

10 Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss; rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.

Jeremiah could see that once the kingdom was destroyed other nations would be curious about God's ability to save His own people or what His children did to deserve such punishment. God would send the death angel (destroyer) by the Babylonians (Chaldeans) to punish His nation. Men, women, boys, and girls

would perish because of their disobedience (**verse 8**). They had broken the covenant, and God was not pleased with His people’s worship of other gods. With their lack of repentance and injustice, God called for retributive justice (**verse 9**). The people of God had begun to weep for a godly king; however, their godly leader (King Josiah) was not going to come back. Furthermore, Jeremiah told them that they should not mourn over King Josiah, who was slain in the Battle of Megiddo (**verse 10a**); rather, they should cry for their current king, who was going into exile to return no more to his native country (**verse 10**).

Although God had promised to protect and keep the people of Judah—just as He does us—we must remember that our keeping His commandments (see Exodus 20) is our investment in His covenant. He reminded the people of Judah of their wrongdoing, just as He does us. It is up to us to repent of our sins and rebuild a solid relationship with Him. Sometimes it is vital for God to chastise us in the most difficult way possible in order for us to get back on track.


 **What Do You Think?** In our nation, we have to deal with corrupt political leaders in high places. As believers, how can we ensure that just leaders are put into office in the next elections?

Your Life

Sometimes, it is necessary for God to completely tear us down while in our sin in order for us to rebuild a healthier relationship with Him. It is okay to start over fresh with God. He loves to see His children striving to do their best for Him.

Your World!

In today’s society, people are caught up on material ideas and fast money. As Christians, we must make sure that we are not walking over the poor and underprivileged to get things we need. We must remember to always do the right thing because God is watching.

 **Closing Prayer** O God, may this lesson today resonate in our hearts so that we will be more obedient to Your Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY , May 25	“Receiving a New Vision of God”	(Genesis 28:10-17)
TUESDAY , May 26	“Justice for Gentile Believers”	(Acts 15:10-17)
WEDNESDAY , May 27	“The Up or Down Choice”	(Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19)
THURSDAY , May 28	“Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt”	(Matthew 2:13-15)
FRIDAY , May 29	“Ephraim Spurns God’s Love and Suffers”	(Hosea 11:3-6)
SATURDAY , May 30	“Once a Slave; Now a Brother”	(Philemon 8-21)
SUNDAY , May 31	“Respond with Love and Justice Daily”	(Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14)