

Jeremiah 11

Conspiracies Happen

Lesson Summary

Jeremiah 11 brings Judah back to the covenant. God had spoken clearly, rescued his people from Egypt, given them the land and repeatedly called them to listen and obey. Yet the people returned to idolatry and trusted the privileges of covenant while ignoring the God of the covenant. Their refusal to listen would now have consequences. For Jeremiah, those consequences become painfully personal when God reveals a conspiracy against his life coming from his own hometown of Anathoth. The chapter moves from a broken covenant to a threatened prophet and asks whether our confidence rests in God himself or merely in the religious things associated with him.

Big Idea

God's covenant gifts can never substitute for listening to and obeying the God who gave them. Judah possessed Torah, Temple, land, priests and covenant, yet those privileges could not protect a people who continually refused God's voice. Jeremiah says "Amen" to God when others will not listen, and his faithfulness eventually makes him a target. Covenant faithfulness is more than possessing the right beliefs and religious institutions; it means hearing God, trusting him and ordering our lives accordingly.

Introduction

Jeremiah 11 begins with covenant and ends with conspiracy. Those may seem like two very different subjects, but they belong together. The people have broken covenant with God, and when Jeremiah announces the consequences, some of the people closest to him decide that the problem is not their disobedience but the prophet who keeps talking about it. Their solution is simple: silence Jeremiah.

This is not a cheerful chapter. God reminds Judah of words they already know, exposes the idolatry that has spread throughout the land, tells Jeremiah not to pray for the people, and finally reveals a plot against his life. Yet running through all of it is a question that matters far beyond Jeremiah's day: What does it mean to belong to God's covenant people while refusing to listen to the God of the covenant?

The Covenant Requires Listening — Jeremiah 11:1–8

The chapter opens simply: "The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD." Hadavar—the word. Before judgment comes, God speaks. Before the consequences arrive, God reminds his people of what he has already said. And for what they are already responsible. They cannot claim ignorance of the Law; it's no excuse.

The covenant in view takes us naturally back to Deuteronomy and probably also to the reforms under King Josiah. The Book of the Torah had been rediscovered, and Josiah responded vigorously. What appeared to be something new was actually something very old. Judah was being called back

to the covenant God had already made with his people. Jeremiah's ministry belonged to that same moment of rediscovery and attempted renewal.

Covenant is more than a religious word. It describes a binding relationship, an agreement in which words matter. That is why the repeated command in this section is so important: hear, listen, obey. The Hebrew idea found in the word *shema* does not allow us to separate hearing from responding, in fact, better to say obeying. God is not looking for people who merely acknowledge that he has spoken. He calls for people who hear his voice and order their lives accordingly.

Jeremiah's response is wonderfully uncomplicated: "Amen, LORD" (11:5). Amen is not merely something we say at the end of a prayer. Jeremiah is saying, in effect, "Yes. I agree. I am on board." Against the repeated refusal of Judah to listen stands the solitary voice of the prophet saying 'Amen' to God.

The reference to Egypt as an "iron furnace" contrasts sharply with Judah, that is, the land flowing with milk and honey. God had rescued Israel from bondage and given them the land as a gift. Their obedience did not earn the rescue; it was the proper response to grace already received. Christopher Wright makes that distinction helpfully: Israel received the land because of God's saving action and his promise to Abraham, while obedience was the means of continuing to live within the blessing of that covenant relationship.

That distinction matters. Obedience is not a way of persuading God to save us. It is the response of people who have already experienced his grace. But grace does not make obedience irrelevant. The covenant contained blessings and curses, as Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 make plain. Judah could not claim the blessings while continually disregarding the God who gave them.

God had also given plenty of warning. We understand warning lights in ordinary life. When the oil light comes on in the car, the tire-pressure warning appears, or the petrol gauge moves toward empty, wisdom says to pay attention and fix what is wrong, or something worse will happen. The warning is not the problem; it is there because a problem already exists. Judah had been given warnings for generations. The tragedy of Jeremiah 11 is not that God had failed to speak. It is that his people had repeatedly refused to listen.

When Covenant Breaking Has Consequences — Jeremiah 11:9–17

Then God uses a striking word: "conspiracy." The people of Judah and Jerusalem have returned to the sins of their ancestors and gone after other gods. This is not merely an occasional lapse by a few individuals. Something has spread through the community. The covenant they have rejected will now produce consequences they cannot escape.

Verse 11 is severe: disaster is coming, and when they cry out, God will not listen. That sounds especially disturbing after all the emphasis on listening in the opening verses. But perhaps that is precisely the point. Judah would not listen to God; eventually they discover that their cries do not obligate God to rescue them from consequences they persistently chose.

Idolatry also multiplies. Jeremiah says, "Your gods have become as many as your cities" (11:13). Turning away from the living God does not leave us religiously neutral. Something else fills the space. One allegiance gives way to another, and another. We may not call our replacements Ba'al,

but human beings remain remarkably capable of giving ultimate importance to things that cannot bear that weight.

The old arcade game Whac-a-Mole provides an almost comic picture of a very serious reality. Hit one mole as it pops up and another immediately appears. Idolatry can work like that. Remove one false source of security and another presents itself. Wealth, reputation, power, pleasure, approval, ideology, even religion itself can become something to which we look for what only God can provide. In Jeremiah's day the evidence was everywhere: there were as many altars to Ba'al as there were streets in Jerusalem.

Then comes one of the hardest instructions Jeremiah receives: "Do not pray for this people" (11:14). Jeremiah is an intercessor, so this is no small command. There comes a point in the chapter when judgment is no longer merely threatened. The accumulated refusal to listen has reached its consequence.

Yet even here the language of God is remarkably tender. In verse 15 he calls Judah "my beloved," and in verse 16 Israel is a beautiful green olive tree. Judgment has not erased affection. In fact, the language makes the judgment more painful. These are not strangers whom God casually dismisses. These are his beloved people. The God who judges covenant rebellion is the same God who grieves over the people he loves. And the one who speaks for God becomes His representative both in word and in weeping, hence Jeremiah's nickname as the Weeping Prophet.

When the Messenger Becomes the Target — Jeremiah 11:18–23

The chapter then becomes intensely personal. Until now Jeremiah has been announcing what Judah has done to God. Suddenly God shows Jeremiah what people intend to do to him.

Jeremiah describes himself as "a gentle lamb led to the slaughter." He had not known that people were plotting against him. Now God reveals the conspiracy: "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more" (11:19).

For Jeremiah, the image of a sacrificial lamb would not have been remote. He came from a priestly family. Sacrifice belonged to the world in which he had grown up. Now the prophet sees himself in that image—vulnerable, apparently powerless, facing people who want him dead.

And who are the conspirators? Verse 21 gives us the painful answer: they are the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown. Chapter 12 will make matters even worse when Jeremiah learns that members of his own family have dealt treacherously with him. Those closest to us often possess the greatest capacity to wound us.

There is an echo here that believers in Yeshua cannot miss. Yeshua would later say, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household" (Matthew 13:57). Jeremiah is not Yeshua, and we should not flatten their stories into one another. Yet the pattern is recognizable: God's messenger speaks an unwelcome word, and instead of receiving the word, people turn against the messenger.

Why would Anathoth hate Jeremiah so much? One possibility is connected with Josiah's reforms. Anathoth was a priestly town. Josiah's campaign against illegitimate worship and local shrines would have affected religious practices and perhaps livelihoods. If Jeremiah publicly supported that reform and continued attacking idolatry, his preaching was not an abstract theological

disagreement. It could have carried very practical consequences for people he had known all his life, and those who had known him as well.

More broadly, Jeremiah has been dismantling Judah's false confidence in the institutions God himself had given them. Torah, Temple, land, circumcision and covenant were not the problem. The problem was using God's gifts as talismans. The people assumed that possession of the right religious things could compensate for lives lived in rebellion against the God who gave them. Jeremiah refuses to allow that deception to continue.

That explains the hostility. Jeremiah is not attacking biblical faith. He is attacking the use of religion and religious banter as protection from God. There is a considerable difference. Bob Mumford, a Bible teacher who influenced me greatly in my earliest days of faith, used to title this, "Verbalized Religious Garbage." (VRG). Making God pedestrian (taking His name in vain) or saying things about God but not living it (hypocrisy) are some of those VRG characteristics that even here would drive a wedge between Jeremiah and the people to whom he spoke.

The Lamb and the Judge

Jeremiah's response to the conspiracy may make modern readers uncomfortable. He asks the LORD of hosts, the righteous judge, to let him see God's vengeance upon his enemies. This is nothing like Yeshua who will centuries later pray, "Father, forgive them." (Luke 23:34) Jeremiah appeals to justice. He has placed his cause before the Judge who knows the heart and tests the innermost person.

We should allow Jeremiah's prayer to remain Jeremiah's prayer rather than hurriedly making it sound more comfortable. He has just learned that people from his hometown want to kill him. His prayer is not theoretical theology; it comes from betrayal and danger.

At the same time, the phrase "lamb led to slaughter" (Jeremiah 11:19) points us toward a greater story. Jeremiah was threatened because he faithfully carried God's word. Yeshua would willingly go much further, giving himself for sinners. Jeremiah asks God to judge those plotting his death; Yeshua bears judgment and offers forgiveness to his enemies. The resemblance is real, but so is the contrast. Isaiah 53:7 will later use the same image of one "like a lamb that is led to slaughter," giving the image an even greater messianic significance.

Takeaways

- 1) Jeremiah 11 asks whether our confidence is actually in God or merely in the things associated with God. Judah had covenant, Torah, Temple, priests and history. None of those gifts could substitute for hearing the voice of God and responding to him.
- 2) The chapter also reminds us that grace and obedience are not enemies. Israel's rescue from Egypt came before Sinai. God saved and then called his people to covenant faithfulness. Obedience did not purchase grace; it demonstrated what living within that gracious relationship looked like.
- 3) Finally, faithfulness does not guarantee approval. Jeremiah said Amen to God and discovered that some of his neighbors wanted him dead. Sometimes obedience will bring us into conflict precisely because God's word exposes the things in which people have misplaced their confidence.

Jeremiah's task was not to make the message acceptable. It was to remain faithful to the One who had spoken.

4) Our confidence, then, must finally be in God himself—not in our religion, our reputation, our institutions, our possessions or our wisdom. Covenant matters when it expresses a genuine relationship with the God of the covenant. He still calls his people to hear, to trust and to obey.

Memory Verse

"The LORD made it known to me and I knew it; then You showed me their deeds."

Jeremiah 11:18

WATCH

The original live teaching from 2022 given in Sydney on Jeremiah 11 is here: [WATCH Jeremiah 11](#)

WHAT'S NEXT?

Jeremiah 12 begins exactly where this chapter leaves off. Jeremiah has discovered that people from Anathoth want him dead, and he soon learns that even members of his own family have dealt treacherously with him. Understandably, he has questions for God. Where does Jeremiah turn with those questions? To God himself.

His complaint becomes one of Scripture's enduring questions: Why do the wicked prosper? Jeremiah knows that God is righteous, but what he sees around him does not seem to match what he knows about God. He takes the matter directly to the heavenly courtroom: "Righteous are You, O LORD...yet I would discuss matters of justice with You." His question is not philosophical speculation. It grows out of personal betrayal and pain.

But Jeremiah is not the only one lamenting. Chapter 12 gives us something remarkable: God's own grief. "My house," "my inheritance," "my vineyard," "my field"—the repeated language is intensely personal. Jeremiah is hurting because God's people have turned against him; God reveals that he too grieves over what his people have become.

The chapter does not give Jeremiah an easy answer. Instead, God enlarges his perspective. Judgment will come, but so will compassion. Even the nations that have harmed Judah are offered a future if they will learn the ways of God's people and listen to him. Jeremiah's question about justice opens into a much larger revelation of God's timing, judgment and mercy.

Bibliography

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