

**Jer. 8-9, Cycles of Sin, Judgment, and Mourning:  
8:4-21, First Cycle  
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**A. Overview**

These chapters seem fairly disordered, compared with the neat structure of 7 and 10. It's worthwhile to review some of the techniques used to discern the underlying structure here.

1. Whole section (7-10) delimited by IF's in 7:1 and 11:1.
2. 7 and 10 have fairly clear internal structure. Basic principle here is analysis by residue. Explain what you can, then look hard at what's left.
3. After reading 8-9 several times (perhaps 10 or 15), three main themes seem to recur: Sin, Judgment, and Mourning. We've seen them before; they are a natural causal chain. Hypothesize that these are the atoms from which the section is constructed.
4. Separate out paragraphs:
  - a) Shifts of speaker
  - b) Rhetorical relations (statement + reason)
  - c) Small structural features (chiasm in 9:7-9)
  - d) Theme: Sin, Judgment, Mourning.
5. Now note that the sin in view in 8:22-9:8 is different from that in the rest of the section. It is social, mainly deceit, and leads Jeremiah to fear for his own welfare. Elsewhere we are looking at sacral sin: ignoring God, idolatry, etc.
6. Drawing now on the causal relations among SJM, we have three cycles, each exhibiting all three components.
7. Integrate this now with the outer sections, to trace an ABCBA chiasm.
  - a) 7 and 10 concentrate on sacral sin, introducing its consequences.
  - b) The consequences and resulting mourning come more into focus in 8 and 9b.
  - c) 9a looks at the social sin that emerges.
8. In the first cycle (8:4-21), sin leads to judgment, and judgment to mourning, in linear fashion. (Gets more complicated in later sections.)

**B. 4-8, SIN**

The underlying sin is refusal to hear the word of the Lord. This is developed as a conversation, with the Lord speaking to Jeremiah, who in turn confirms the observation and then reports to the people what they are doing.

**September 20, 1989** Post-presentation note: see memo on "my

people." Since the Lord's words often include the third person use of YHWH, there is no good reason to make 8:7 the words of Jeremiah. Thus this whole section can now be in the mouth of the Lord.

1. 4-5, The Lord observes to Jeremiah that the people refuse correction. The paragraph is one of contraexpectation. Example: Birds can fly (generic). Tweety is a bird; why can't he fly? (deviation). Tweety is a penguin (explanation).
  - a) 4: Generic truths about God and Israel, expressed as a rhetorical question. (Note the change in number between the two questions.)
    - 1) Israel: Do people fall and not get up again? From earliest childhood, people learn perseverance.
    - 2) God: He turns from idolaters (Josh. 24:20), but is always ready to turn back (Zech. 1:3). Cf. Isa. 54:7,8 for God's readiness to turn back to those from whom he has turned away.
  - b) 5a: The deviation. Why then is Israel's apostasy perpetual? Why don't they come back?
  - c) 5b: The explanation.
    - 1) "They hold fast to THE deceit."  
Notice the article. A particular deception is in view. *tarmit* only occurs 5x in the OT; two of the others are Jer. 14:14 and 23:26, and in both is it associated with the false prophets, who (14:13) offer a false hope of peace. We have seen this already in 4:10. The people are clinging to this futile thread of hope to excuse their persistence in sin.
    - 2) "They refuse to return." This is a deliberate exercise of the will.
2. 6-7, Jeremiah confirms this observation to the Lord.
  - a) 6a, his investigation. He verifies what he has heard from the Lord. Perhaps he doesn't believe it at first.
  - b) 6b-7, what he observes. A chiasm, with negative statements on the outside and a positive statement in the middle. Consider the negative statements first, then the positive.
    - 1) 6b, Defect in their Speech. They do not speak correctly, acknowledging their error. They may mourn over the suffering that they experience, but they will not go so far as to question their own conduct.
    - 2) 7, Defect in their Knowledge. The birds named here are migratory, and come and go with the seasons. They understand and follow the order that God has imposed on them, but Judah

does not know his *mišpat*, his customs or standards expressed in his law.

3) 6c, What they do: stampede on their way, without hope of turning aside.

3. 8, Jeremiah now turns to the people to warn them.

a) They protest, "We have the law of the Lord."

b) Translate, "The lying pen of the scribes has made [it] a lie." The object here understood is the "law of the Lord." Judah's religious leaders have assured the people, "That's not really what it means." This is the mechanism by which the deceit of 5b is perpetrated.

Or (Holladay), "The lie of the scribes has made the pen (metonymy for the written law) a lie." Their words and the law of God cannot both be true at the same time.

c) **Application:** How easily a faulty commentator can twist a passage and set it on its ear--as Peter reminds us, "to their own destruction." We must remember that the Scripture always takes priority over those who expound it or comment on it.

#### C. 9-17, JUDGMENT

Again chiasitic, with the Lord announcing judgment on the outsides, and Jeremiah and the people recognizing it in the middle (14-15).

1. 9-13: The Lord announces coming judgment

10-12 is an echo of 6:12-15. There, the recipients were the people in general, who refused to hear Jeremiah. Here, 9 redefines the recipients of the judgment as the corrupt scribes of v.8, and v.13 elaborates on the judgment that they will receive.

a) 9, The Recipients

1) They style themselves as "wise."

2) Yet they will be put to shame. This is the worst possible fate for a scholar--to be proven wrong!

3) The reason: they have refused the word of God; set up their wisdom in opposition to his; and thus there can be no true wisdom in them.

b) 10-12, The Echo. Probably recalled here because of its central verse, v.11, recalling the false prophecies of peace to Judah.

c) 13, The Judgment

Presented as a summary followed by its amplification.

1) The Summary: "surely consume them:" combines two verbs, one "to gather," as grapes in a vineyard; the other "to make an end." "I will make an end of them by gleaning them." God will pick them bare.

2) The amplification:

- a> As it stands in the KJV, looks as though he is describing failure of the crops that he has given them.
- b> But the last clause is more smoothly rendered, "I have appointed to them those who will pass over them," that is, God has prepared an adversary to pick them bare, per the summary.
- c> Thus it seems natural to understand the preceding three agricultural phrases as metaphors for the state of Judah, God's vine and fig tree, after this judgment falls. Cf. 6:9.

2. 14-15, Jer with people perceive the coming judgment. We have here a causal chain. The "we" includes Jeremiah, and as a result this confession shows somewhat more understanding of the situation than the people typically manifest.

- a) 14a. Don't sit out here in the open: get into the fortifications, and hide quietly like a rabbit under a bush. Maybe the enemy will think no one is home. Alternate: silent because they are destroyed.
- b) Reason for hiding: God's judgment is on us. "He has put us to silence": destroyed us? But then how can they go on to drink wormwood? Cf. Rom. 3:19, the Law of God stops every mouth in the day of judgment.
- c) Reason for judgment: "We have sinned." v.15 amplifies the nature of this sin. This is possible in English, and even clearer in Heb, which uses the inf. abs. for "hope", commonly an adverbial construction, cf. GKC 113h. Their sin is one of optimism! They have dared to hope for peace and healing when their own actions and God's law all should lead them to expect only judgment and terror.

**Application:** Woe unto us if we dull the edge of God's Word, turning "must" into "should" and "never" into "sometimes", replacing a warning of judgment with a promise of salvation. There is, indeed, good news in the Bible, but it requires us to acknowledge and forsake our sin, not whitewash it. To encourage those who are rebelling against God that all will be well is a heinous sin, because it twists the word of God; those who do so face sure destruction (2 Pet. 3:16).

3. 16-17: YHWH: coming judgment

- a) "From Dan:" the judgment comes from the north. Dan was the northernmost tribe. This is the route followed by the mesopotamian powers when they invaded the Levant.

b) The figure of judgment progresses from literal to figurative.

- 1) The literal truth: the enemy's horses come from the north.
- 2) A bit more figurative: their whinnying shakes all the earth (not just the land of Israel); they devour everything in sight.
- 3) Now the beasts are transformed completely, into venomous serpents whose bite is fatal.

**D. 18-21, MOURNING**

The section is chiastic in the speaker, ABCBA, with God at the center.

1. 18: Jer.

The first word is excruciatingly difficult. If we follow the AV, which is as good as anything at this point, Jeremiah here exemplifies the true believer's response to false comfort. Unlike the false teachers and their congregations, he can find no peace in the face of God's verdict.

2. 19a: People.

Jeremiah quotes their cry. AV "because of them that dwell in a far country" is not as straightforward as, simply, "from a far country." He sees the nation already in exile, and from there bemoaning their fate. They still can't figure out how, with their magical god-box, they could have been defeated. "Isn't the Lord in Zion?" How could this have happened?

3. 19b: God answers the people's question with one of his own: "Has it ever occurred to you that your idolatry might have something to do with it?" NB: If God is not first in our lives, if obedience to him is not the top priority, then it's no good calling on him in time of trouble.

4. 20: People.

They express their despair with a proverbial expression. In an agricultural economy, if you don't raise enough during the year, you go hungry all winter. What dismal prospects there are when "the harvest is past, the summer is ended." All opportunities for help are over; the "accepted time," the "day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2, quoting Isa. 49:8), is past, and now there is no salvation.

5. 21: Jeremiah: Enters fully into mourning for the suffering of his people. NB: No holier-than-thou prophet, he. Though they have rejected the truth, he weeps for them rather than gloating over their suffering. So we ought to mourn over fallen christendom, and never boast ourselves in our supposed superiority.