

4 December 2023 – Competing Prophecies

Jeremiah 14: 13-end

Text:

13 Then I said: 'Ah, Lord GOD! Here are the prophets saying to them, "You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you true peace in this place."' 14 And the LORD said to me: The prophets are prophesying lies in my name; I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name though I did not send them, and who say, 'Sword and famine shall not come on this land': By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword. There shall be no one to bury them—their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their wickedness upon them.

17 You shall say to them this word:

Let my eyes run down with tears night and day,
and let them not cease,
for the virgin daughter—my people—is struck down with a crushing blow,
with a very grievous wound.

18 If I go out into the field,

look—those killed by the sword!

And if I enter the city,

look—those sick with [b] famine!

For both prophet and priest ply their trade throughout the land,
and have no knowledge.

19 Have you completely rejected Judah?

Does your heart loathe Zion?

Why have you struck us down

so that there is no healing for us?

We look for peace, but find no good;

for a time of healing, but there is terror instead.

20 We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD,

the iniquity of our ancestors,

for we have sinned against you.

21 Do not spurn us, for your name's sake;

do not dishonour your glorious throne;

remember and do not break your covenant with us.

22 Can any idols of the nations bring rain?

Or can the heavens give showers?

Is it not you, O LORD our God?

We set our hope on you,

for it is you who do all this.



Thought:

This is a text about competing prophecies.

The false prophets are prophesying that God has promised peace to his people.

But God has told Jeremiah to warn the people that famine and war are coming.

This is a difficult text and so we are not surprised that Jeremiah didn't get much traction for his message of doom and gloom.

At Christmas the church proclaims the Prince of Peace. We don't say to the people; 'Happy Christmas! There's going to be famine and war!'

This ancient text is addressed to the Jews, the people of Judah, the people who would live in Zion. And maybe that makes me search for a message in this text for what is happening in the Holy Land today. Or maybe that's just because I think about Gaza and Israel every day because it is dominating the news headlines.

What is my prophecy for what will happen in the Holy Land? The Israeli government is in the driving seat. Some of the language coming out of Israel suggests that the killing and destruction in Gaza will very likely continue and many thousands more people will die. The scale of the suffering is already horrific but could actually get worse to a whole new level.

But at the time of writing, there is actually a pause in the fighting and captives are being released in small groups every day. I posted a prayer online hoping that God would take this ceasefire agreement and the joy of the families reconciled with their loved ones who had been held captive and build a lasting peace.

Somebody admonished me for suggesting there was a kind of equivalence between people being released from Israeli prisons and people being released from captivity in Gaza. This person felt that there was no equivalence because the hostages taken by Hamas are entirely innocent whereas the people in Israeli prisons are all guilty and do not deserve to be free.

This got me thinking about equivalence. A lot of what is wrong about the whole situation in Israel and Gaza is the lack of equivalence. The readiness for violence stems from the idea that the suffering on my side is terrible and the suffering on the other side doesn't matter. And so, I wonder whether, actually, if we genuinely desire peace, we should be emphasising the equivalence of human experiences on each side as often as we can. Maybe in the daily scenes of hostages being returned to families in Israel and in the West Bank, people will see glimpses of the humanity we share and the God who loves us all.

If I were a betting man, I would put money on the ceasefire not holding, the violence resuming and thousands more people being killed and traumatised. But I'm not a betting

man. I'm a praying man. And so I pray that God will use these moments of reconciliation and strengthen our capacity to see the path that leads to peace.

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