

Day One

Here in Jeremiah 17:5-8, God is speaking about a secure future. The primary focus isn't on the here and now. Certainly those who don't believe can experience the consequences described in their lives in the here and now, but it's just as likely that they don't. How many times have you wondered why those who cut corners or cheat in other ways prosper while you, who would never cheat, don't?

That's part of the difficulty of living in a broken world and with understanding texts like this one in Jeremiah. If we only focus on this life, then these words raise more questions than they answer. But if we understand that God is talking here specifically about the future – about an eternal future – then a lot of those questions disappear.

For those who don't believe, their future (in spite of all the blessings they enjoy in this life) will be one of want and despair. They will be isolated (living in a salt land where no one lives). They will be cut off. Hell is no party. It is a prison where everyone is living in solitary confinement. And there is no hope of escape.

For those who believe, they are like a tree planted by the water. They are connected to the source of life who is Jesus Christ. And in that union, their future is secure. They have no worries even in the midst of hardships experienced in this life. They have no worries because the tomb is empty. The power of sin and death has been overthrown. They have been set free from that prison and now nothing in all of creation can separate from the love on God in Christ Jesus.

Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is working here in Isaiah (Isaiah 63:7-9) to refocus His people on what is of the utmost importance. Isaiah becomes a spokesman for God. He will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord according to all that God has done for him and those he speaks to.

For Isaiah that would have included speaking about the days of Moses – God's deliverance with a mighty hand – the Passover when the blood of the lamb caused the Angel of Death to pass over their homes and spare their lives. He would have talked about how God delivered them from the hands of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. God saved them. In His love and mercy He redeemed them.

What Isaiah would have spoken about, we too speak about. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's saving work. He is the Lamb of God by whose blood we have been saved. The power of death to destroy has been broken. We have passed through the waters of Baptism and have been delivered from those powers that would enslave us (sin and death).

When we are troubled or distressed, when trials come, when things seem out of control, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus who is our salvation and life. We need to fix our eyes on Jesus and all His work done for us and our salvation.

Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 61:1-6 is about restoration. But the question is: A restoration to what? Certainly this would connect to the days of David and Solomon – to the days when Israel was the ruling nation in the Middle East. It would be a return to the days when God gave David rest from all of his enemies – to the wealth of Solomon. And that's what many were looking for in Jesus' day. They were looking for a warrior king like David who would set them free from Roman rule.

But there is another connection. That is the connection to the Garden of Eden – to a time when there was no reason to mourn or grieve or despair. It would be a return to the days before Adam and Eve sinned – when all that God had created was very good.

And the only one who could do that was Jesus. The Son of God took on human flesh and came into the world to bind up the brokenhearted – to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance. Certainly, He proclaimed that in His words and deeds when He healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead.

But it is most clearly seen on the cross. On that cross where Jesus died, God's favor and vengeance were both on display. God's vengeance was poured out against sin. His judgment fell in all of its fury. And God's favor

is on display because it was God Himself who received that blow and not us. He died so that we could live. By faith in Jesus and His saving work, we do indeed live.

Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Galatians 3, Paul is writing about the curse of the law. I think, if asked, many would say that the curse of the law is all of the dos and don'ts. There are either too many commands or many that don't apply anymore or they are just unnecessary. In any case, for them the solution to the curse of the law is to do away with the law.

That was the motivation for the movement to ban any public display of the Ten Commandments. It's hard to do away with the law if you are publicly reminded of by such displays. Situational ethics and subjective truth (or morality) are other attempts to do away with the law.

The problem is that the curse of the law is much more than the specific laws themselves. It is the result of the law's demand for perfection and our inability to keep that law perfectly. The penalty for breaking any of God's commands in thought, word or deed is death. That's the curse. And there is nothing that we can do to lift that curse off of us.

That's why Paul writes that Christ became a curse for us. He took that curse upon Himself. He suffered that death – that eternal death that is complete separation from God. He was forsaken. He was cut off. He was cursed in our place – suffering the penalty that we deserve.

He did that so that we might live free from that curse through the forgiveness of sins that He shares with us. He became a curse for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him. And we live in that righteousness by faith in Jesus and His saving work done for us and given to us.

Day Five

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here in Isaiah 58:5-9a, we see a contrast between self-centered activity and other-centered activity. Fasting is a good activity with many personal benefits. You fast to remove distractions. You fast in order to get closer to God. In the Old Testament, fasting was often part of repentance – of bowing before God – and throwing oneself on the mercy of God. For whatever the reason, the focus is always on God.

If fasting becomes a means to prove your worth to God like the Pharisee in Luke 18:11-12 who used his fasting practice as a way to show that he was better than other men, then the focus has turned to self. Fasting becomes a means to prove my righteousness – to lift me up in comparison to others. I may not be perfect, but I'm better than most.

And that then is the contrast. In Isaiah, God is saying that if the fasting done is for show – to prove something to God – then their fasting is no fast at all. In fact, the attitude that turns fasting into a means for self-justification works to bind up and increase the burden of every yoke. I can't relieve the burden of someone else's sin, if I'm going to continue to justify myself at their expense.

That's why God says that the fast He desires is to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke – to share food with the hungry – provide shelter to the wanderer – to clothe the naked and not turn your back on your neighbor.

That's the fast that God desires because it is focused on the needs of others. We set ourselves and our needs aside in order to care for those in need around us. It is a fast that knows all of my needs have been met in Christ. It is a fast that knows the tomb is empty and my future is secure. It is a fast that causes us to be Jesus' hands and feet to those in need so that He, working through us, might draw them to Himself and the hope that is ours by faith in Him