

OpenTheo

January 15th: Jeremiah 14 & 2 Thessalonians 2

January 14, 2021



Alastair Roberts

Jeremiah praying for drought-stricken Judah. The coming of the Man of Lawlessness.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

If you have enjoyed my output, please tell your friends. If you are interested in supporting my videos and podcasts and my research more generally, please consider supporting my work on Patreon (<https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>), using my PayPal account (<https://bit.ly/2RLaUcB>), or by buying books for my research on Amazon (https://www.amazon.co.uk/hz/wishlist/ls/36WVSWCK4X33O?ref_=wl_share).

The audio of all of my videos is available on my Soundcloud account: <https://soundcloud.com/alastairadversaria>. You can also listen to the audio of these episodes on iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/podcast/alastairs-adversaria/id1416351035?mt=2>.

Transcript

Jeremiah chapter 14. The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought. Judah mourns, and her gates languish.

Her people lament on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem goes up. Her nobles send their servants for water. They come to the cisterns, they find no water.

They return with their vessels empty. They are ashamed and confounded, and cover their heads, because of the ground that is dismayed, since there is no rain on the land. The farmers are ashamed, they cover their heads.

Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn, because there is no grass. The wild donkeys stand on the bare heights. They pant for air like jackals.

Their eyes fail, because there is no vegetation. Though our iniquities testify against us,

act, O Lord, for your namesake. For our backslidings are many, we have sinned against you.

O you hope of Israel, its saviour in time of trouble, why should you be like a stranger in the land, like a traveller who turns aside to tarry for a night? Why should you be like a man confused, like a mighty warrior who cannot save? Yet you, O Lord, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name. Do not leave us. Thus says the Lord concerning this people.

They have loved to wander thus, they have not restrained their feet, therefore the Lord does not accept them. Now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. The Lord said to me, Do not pray for the welfare of this people.

Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them, but I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. Then I said, Our Lord God, behold, the prophets say to them, You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place. 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. Therefore thus says the Lord concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name, although I did not send them, and who say, Sword and famine shall not come upon this land.

By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed, and the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them, them, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them. 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 of my people is shattered with a great wound, with a very grievous blow. If I go out into the field, behold those pierced by the sword, and if I enter the city, behold the diseases of famine. For both prophet and priest ply their trade through the land, and have no knowledge.

Have you utterly rejected Judah? Does your soul loathe Zion? Why have you struck us down, so that there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good came, for a time of healing, but behold terror. We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you. Do not spurn us for your namesake.

Do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember and do not break your covenant with us. Are there any among the false gods of the nations that can bring rain, or can the heavens give showers? Are you not he, O Lord our God? We set our hope on you, for you

do all these things.

Jeremiah chapter 14 is introduced as the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought. This introduction might refer to the entirety of chapters 14 and 15. There's no indication of the date given here, and although the drought was clearly very severe, we have no reference to it in the books of Kings or Chronicles.

This is another of Jeremiah's prayers of lament. As a nation, Israel depended upon the rains for its irrigation. While the land of Egypt was primarily irrigated through the Nile, Israel depended upon the rains, and a lack of rain could be devastating for the land and its people.

Prayer for rain was often associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, and one of the curses of the covenant was the cutting off of rain. Deuteronomy chapter 11 verses 16 to 17. Take care lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them.

Then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain, and the land will yield no fruit, and you will perish quickly after good land that the Lord is giving you. Deuteronomy chapter 28 verses 22 to 24. The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, and with fever, inflammation, and fiery heat, and with drought, and with blight, and with mildew.

They shall pursue you until you perish. And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder.

From heaven dust shall come down on you, until you are destroyed. The most famous drought of course was the drought on Israel during the reign of King Ahab. In 1 Kings chapter 18 verses 5 to 6, Ahab and Obadiah have to go throughout the land searching for grass for the horses and the mules, who are about to die on account of the prolonged drought.

Here the experience of the drought is described as a sort of nationwide mourning. Judah is in mourning, and her personified gates are languishing. Similar imagery is also used in Isaiah chapter 3 verse 26.

And her gates shall lament and mourn, empty she shall sit on the ground. Even the nobles of the land struggle to obtain water, they send out their servants, who come back empty. The farmers of the land are also dismayed, as are the beasts.

The doe forsakes her newborn fawn as she struggles to find the food that she needs. Another description of the impact of a drought upon the animals of the land can be found in Joel chapter 1 verses 18 and 20. How the beasts groan, the herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them, even the flocks of sheep suffer.

Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. The wild donkeys are even going blind, as they are malnourished without the grass that they need. The whole land is in a state of mourning.

And in verses 7 to 9 there is a confession of sin. This is presumably Jeremiah confessing on behalf of the whole people. Jeremiah acts as the prophet interceding for the people.

There are various examples of communal confessions of sin, or a prophet confessing on behalf of the people in the scripture. Daniel chapter 9 is such an example. In 1st Samuel chapter 7 the people ask Samuel to pray for them.

Jeremiah speaking for the people acknowledges that the drought has come upon them on account of their sin. They have broken the covenant and so they are suffering the covenant curse. Nonetheless they look to the Lord.

The Lord can act to save his people for his name's sake. The people are his people, called by his name. However appealing to the Lord as the hope of Israel, its saviour in time of trouble, Jeremiah asks why the Lord should be like a stranger in the land, someone who is just passing through and staying for the night.

His commitment to the people does not seem to be expressed in his actual deliverance of them. In an especially bold statement, Jeremiah calls upon the Lord not to act like a mighty man or a warrior who is unable to save his people. The Lord is in the name of the people.

Jeremiah beseeches the Lord to act on behalf of them. Yet he receives a discouraging answer from the Lord. The people have delighted to stray away from him and now the Lord will not accept them.

The time has come to bring their sins upon them in judgment. The Lord forbids Jeremiah from praying for the people. This is not the first time that this has happened.

We see the same thing in Jeremiah chapter 7 verse 16 and chapter 11 verse 14. As for you, do not pray for this people or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you. And again, therefore do not pray for this people or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

The Lord has doomed the people to destruction by sword, famine, and pestilence. It is too late to try and escape their fate through fasts, prayers, and sacrifices. The time has passed and now their judgment is inevitable.

But even though the Lord declares this judgment, Jeremiah has to contend with competing prophets who are giving a very different sort of message. Their message is

one of false reassurance, telling the people that everything is going to be okay, that no judgment is going to fall upon them. In Jeremiah chapter 6 verses 13 to 15, this struggle that Jeremiah faced with the false prophets is also described.

From the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain, and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed.

They did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall. At the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord.

In Jeremiah chapter 28, we have an example of Jeremiah's struggle with false prophets, with Hananiah, who prophesied peace and deliverance from Babylon. Jeremiah confronts Hananiah and declares to him, The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. As for the prophet who prophesied peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent that prophet.

Another famous example of struggling with false prophets is in 1 Kings chapter 22, as the prophet Micaiah prophesied defeat for Ahab and Israel in the battle, and struggles with Zedekiah who prophesied otherwise. Here the Lord announces that the judgment that they had denied would come upon them, that the false prophets, their wives, their sons, and their daughters would all suffer death by famine and sword, and no one would be able to bury them. The chapter ends with Jeremiah being instructed to deliver a lament to the people.

He describes the devastation of the drought, but also sees ahead to the effects of the sword and the consequent famine in the city. Even beyond the drought, Judah faces destruction at the hand of foreign invaders. The sickness of the nation, however, is pervasive.

Neither the priest nor the prophet lead the people into truth. The prophet's eyes run down with tears, but yet he's been instructed not to pray for the people. Nonetheless, hoping against hope, he pounds in desperation upon the closed heavens.

Perhaps in the Lord's mercy, he might give some more favorable answer. Once again he confesses the people's sin, their sin and the sins of their fathers. Once again he appeals to the covenant.

He appeals to the Lord's honour, the honour of his name. He appeals to the Lord's power. None of the false gods of the nations can bring rain.

None of them have that power. In expressing the Lord's praise in this way, he's calling for the Lord to act, to display his power, mercifully to demonstrate his might over the

false gods and deliver his people. Yet, pound as he might, no answer seems to be forthcoming.

A question to consider. Can he think of occasions when the Lord heeded intercession for his people? Can he think of any differences between this occasion in Jeremiah and those?
1. And the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 2. Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you these things? And you know what is restraining him now, so that he may be revealed in his time.

But the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 3. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan, with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. Now may the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 we discover that some people in Thessalonica are already claiming that the day of the Lord has come, or that it has begun in some way. This event might be referring to the final coming of Christ, but could also refer to a coming of Christ of an epoch-changing character, such as AD 70 represented. AD 70 involved a great tribulation, a coming of Christ, and a gathering of the people of the Lord, described in Matthew chapter 24 verses 29 to 31.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

They should not be deceived, because Christ would not return without a widespread falling away or apostasy from the faith first. Prior to the advent of Christ, there must also be the revelation of the man of lawlessness. This statement is developed from Daniel chapter 11 verses 31 and 36 by way of the Olivet Discourse.

Daniel chapter 11 verse 31. Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. And in verse 36 of that chapter, and the king shall do as he wills.

He shall exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak astonishing things against the god of gods. He shall prosper till the indignation is accomplished, for what is decreed shall be done. Paul also picks up the language of Theodosian's Greek translation of Daniel chapter 12 verses 10 to 11, with its reference to the end time tribulation as one during which the lawless ones will do lawlessness, and none of the lawless ones will understand.

In Daniel, this lawlessness is connected to the establishment of the abomination of desolation and the end of regular temple sacrifice. It's an event focused upon the temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus takes this up in the Olivet Discourse. Mark chapter 13 verses 14 to 19 and 24 to 27 speak of the abomination of desolation and the tribulation, followed by the coming of the Son of Man and the gathering of the elect to Christ.

For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now, and never will be. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

In Daniel, there is a figure who persecutes, brings about the desecration of the temple, and leads astray, who challenges the people of God, who exalts himself and will end up being overcome by God. Paul argues that this will take place before Christ is revealed. Yet even before the specific man of lawlessness is revealed, a principle of lawlessness is already at work in the world.

Jesus speaks of this, presumably alluding to Daniel, in Matthew chapter 24 verse 12. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. Jesus refers here, as John refers in Revelation, to a tribulation that has already begun in the first century AD, a tribulation drawn from the prophecy of Daniel.

These prophecies of great tribulation in Daniel have begun fulfillment in Christ and in Israel. Even before that, they looked forward to the persecution under Antiochus

Epiphanes. The tribulation arrives in progressive stages, perhaps like ascending Russian dolls.

At each stage, we should know the pattern to expect. Alternatively, we could see it as a telescoping effect, as a series of closely related events that stand at a great distance in time, that can be collapsed into a single concentric structure of expectation. It is a single reality that is awaited, but a reality that arrives in progressive stages.

Paul wants to assure the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord has not already begun. Even if they may have received unsettling communications or messages purporting to be from Paul and his fellow missionaries that it had. The Thessalonians were rightly expecting an epoch-changing day of the Lord on the very near horizon.

Jesus had taught that that generation would not pass away until the events prophesied in the Olivet Discourse occurred, and that some people standing hearing him teach would not die before they saw the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. This event was not necessarily the end of the physical cosmos, but it was the end of a world, the end of an epoch. Paul wants them to understand that the day of the Lord, whether the day of the Lord on the near horizon, or the day of the Lord on the final horizon, will not arrive until the man of lawlessness is revealed.

Jesus, in his teaching in the Olivet Discourse, had described the way that false teachers and false messiahs and confusing messages would come along, leading people to wonder whether he had already returned. However, the day of the Lord would not arrive before a large-scale apostasy of Christians had occurred. A principle of lawlessness would be growing, tribulation would be gathering pace, and many would fall away.

Matthew chapter 24 verses 10 to 12 writes, And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another, and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. Before the day itself comes, the man of lawlessness must be revealed, someone described as the son of destruction.

It is perhaps interesting to note that there is one other figure in the New Testament who is called the son of destruction, that is Judas Iscariot in John chapter 17 verse 12. While I was with them I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction that the scripture might be fulfilled.

This might help us to recognise a further way in which the sufferings of Christ anticipated and played out in miniature the reality of the end times themselves. Tribulation, betrayal, Satan being given a free reign, revelation of the son of destruction, widespread falling away, deliverance to death, etc. All of these things occur in the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ.

The man of lawlessness that Paul describes is closely connected to the temple, where he is elevated, setting himself up as if he were God. Paul and his fellow missionaries had already instructed the Thessalonians concerning this when they were with them. The principle of lawlessness is already operative at that time.

John speaks in a similar way in 1 John chapter 2 verse 18. Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, so now many Antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.

For the time being, however, there were forces holding the principle of lawlessness back. Perhaps this is the restraining work of the Holy Spirit exercised through the ministry of the Church. When this was removed, however, all hell would break loose.

My suspicion is that this, on the nearest horizon of the first century, referred to the Church in Jerusalem in the run up to AD 70, where the leader of the Church, James, the brother of Jesus, was martyred and then the rest of the Church later fled the city, leaving lawlessness to run rampant and unchecked, without any righteous remnant to arrest it. We might also compare this to the destruction of Sodom. When Lot's family was delivered from the city, the city was no longer preserved.

The man of lawlessness most likely refers to a high priest setting himself up in the temple as if it were his own palace, rather than the palace of the Lord. James Jordan suggests that it is Ananias. Others have argued that it might be John of Gisgala, a leader of the Jewish revolt, or Phaneus, the last high priest, who is described as follows by Josephus, the zealots undertook to dispose of the high priesthood by casting lots for it, whereas, as we have said already, it was to descend by succession in a family.

The pretense they made for this strange attempt was an ancient practice, while they said that of old it was determined by Lot, but in truth it was no better than a dissolution of an undeniable law and a cunning contrivance to seize upon the government, derived from those that presumed to appoint governors as they themselves pleased. Hereupon they sent for one of the pontifical tribes, which is called Aniochon, and cast lots which of it should be the high priest. By fortune the lots so fell as to demonstrate their iniquity after the plainest manner, for it fell upon one whose name was Phaneus, the son of Samuel, of the village Apatha.

He was a man not only unworthy of the high priesthood, but that did not know well what the high priesthood was, such a mere rustic was he. Yet did they hail this man, without his own consent, out of the country, as if they were acting a play upon the stage, and adorned him with a counterfeit face. They also put upon him the sacred garments, and upon every occasion instructed him what he was to do.

This horrid piece of wickedness was sport and pastime with them, but occasioned the other priests, who at a distance saw their law made a jest of, to shed tears, and sorely

lament the dissolution of such a sacred dignity. The Lord Jesus would then kill the man of lawlessness, with the fiery breath of his mouth in his coming. This I believe refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, its temple, and its leaders in A.D. 70.

The behaviour of the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, is in accord with the activity of Satan. This period would be one of satanic possession and activity, just as the period of Christ's sufferings and passion was the time of Satan, where Satan was released to do his greatest damage and to wreak havoc. So the expected day of the Lord will be preceded by another such unleashing of Satan.

Just as Satan entered into Judas, so Satan's shadowy agency will be apparent surrounding the man of lawlessness. There will be false signs and wonders, strong deception and delusion, and people will be brought to their own destruction. This could be compared to the story of the Exodus, where there are false signs and wonders done by the Egyptian magicians, and Pharaoh's heart is hardened to the point of near insanity.

God himself will bring delusion to them, so that they are led to their own destruction. The destruction is something that they bring upon themselves though. We might think of 1 Kings chapter 22 verses 19 to 23 here.

And Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of the Lord. I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside him, on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said one thing, and another said another.

Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, saying, I will entice him. And the Lord said to him, By what means? And he said, I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, You are to entice him, and you shall succeed.

Go out and do so. Now therefore behold, the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets. The Lord has declared disaster for you.

The fascinating thing in the case of Micaiah is that he is directly telling Ahab that God has sent him delusion. Surely if God is trying to trap Ahab then this is precisely the wrong way to go about it. Yet the fact is that Ahab loves the delusion.

The wicked do not believe the truth, not because the truth isn't presented to them, or even that the truth is not in any way apparent to them, but because they refuse to love the truth. When it comes down to it they want to believe the lie, and God gives them what they want. Even when he gives it to them with flashing warning signs they still swallow it whole because they hate the truth.

When we see unbelief in our day this is so often what it comes down to. Some Christians get drawn into futile debates about the truth of certain teachings, failing to recognise that some people simply hate the truth and will swallow even obvious lies that present

themselves as alternatives to it. The problem often isn't that scripture isn't clear enough on certain matters, but that people refuse to love the truth.

Before we can receive the truth we need to be lovers of the truth, people who seek the truth where it can be found and who will go where it leads. The Thessalonian believers however contrast with all of this. Once again Paul declares their sense of duty as the missionaries to give thanks for what God is doing and has done among the Thessalonians.

They have been chosen for salvation. This salvation will be accomplished if they are set apart by and conform to God's righteous judgment by the work of the spirit and as they believe in the truth. We don't reflect enough upon the strangeness of belief in the truth in a fallen race that loves and wants to believe the lie.

The Thessalonians having been chosen for salvation in such a manner were called to it through the gospel declaration and summons of the missionaries, to the end that they might participate in the glory of the reigning Lord Jesus the Messiah. They must not be swayed by rumours and false reports then but must stand firm in the teachings that they had been given by Paul and the missionaries. Paul concludes the chapter by praying that the Lord Jesus Christ and God the Father who by grace gave the entire gospel reality will settle their troubled hearts and establish them firmly in the truth against the day when all who are not grounded in a love for every good word and every good work will be uprooted in that time of testing.

A question to consider, what are some ways in which we grow in our love of the truth so that our hearts are guarded against the appeal of the lie?