

WHY THE LAND MOURNS

by Ray C. Stedman

In our last study, in Jeremiah 20, we were, historically speaking, in the fourth year of the reign of King Jehoiakim in Judah, when Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, for the first time brought his armies up against Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar made several expeditions against the city before it was finally overthrown and demolished, and its people led into captivity. In this first invasion Nebuchadnezzar took away into Babylon certain treasures from the temple at Jerusalem, and also certain young princes of Judah. Among them was a young man named Daniel, whose name you will recognize, and with him three of his friends: Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, who perhaps are better known to you by their Babylonian names -- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Jehoiakim was left in Jerusalem to be a vassal king, and he reigned seven more years. Then he rebelled against the government of Nebuchadnezzar, was deposed by another Babylonian invasion, and his son, Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah, was put on the throne. He reigned for only three months, and then was taken as a captive to Babylon. His uncle, Zedekiah, one of the remaining sons of King Josiah, was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar to serve as a kind of caretaker king.

That brings us to the twenty-first chapter of Jeremiah -- all this has happened between Chapters 20 and 21. So it is a number of years later, and Zedekiah, weakest of all the kings of Judah and the last of the line, is now on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar is sending up another army against Jerusalem, the city is under siege, and king Zedekiah now sends a hasty word to Jeremiah the prophet, asking him to intercede with God on their behalf:

This is the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchiah and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying, "Inquire of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon [This is merely another spelling of Nebuchadnezzar; both are used in Scripture.] is making war against us; perhaps the Lord will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds, and win make him withdraw from us." {Jer 21:1-2 RSV}

That sounds very pious, does it not? King Zedekiah is asking the prophet to intercede with God, so that "maybe God will be his old, sweet, kindly self and let us go." There are many people who pray in that way, who think that God is only for getting you out of trouble. They imagine that you can go on doing as you please, living the way you want, and ignoring all the efforts of God to check your course and correct your folly, and then, when you really get into trouble, all you have to do is pray, and God will come and set you free, and everything will be all right. A lot of people treat God that way. That was what this king was doing -- expecting God to come through.

Of course, that view of God sees him as only a kind of heavenly genie, ready when you rub the lamp of prayer to appear and say, "Yes, master; what do you want me to do?" But God is not like that. God is sovereign. God moves according to his own purposes, and he does not play games with us. He is not to be mollified and placated by a temporary return to him when we get into difficulty. Zedekiah found this out, for God sent an answer back:

Then Jeremiah said to them: "Thus you shall say to Zedekiah, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war which are in your hands and with which you are fighting against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the walls; and I will bring them together into the midst of this city. [Zedekiah, not only am I not going to help you; I'll hinder you. I will cause the weapons with which you are fighting to be turned against you.] I myself will fight against you with outstretched hand and strong arm, in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence. Afterward, says the Lord, I will give Zedekiah king of Judah, and his

servants, and the people in this city who survive the pestilence, sword, and famine, into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of their enemies, into the hand of those who seek their lives. He shall smite them with the edge of the sword; he shall not pity them, or spare them, or have compassion." {Jer 21:3-7 RSV}

There is a way this king could have found the mercy and grace of God, of course. Had he knelt before God and confessed his evil deeds, and called upon God out of a heart of contrition and repentance, God would have turned and met him. He promises that it still is not too late. But God is not there simply for the bargaining. He is not someone to whom we can call for help only out of a fervid desire to escape the consequences of our folly, but with no real change of heart. Verse 10 summarizes the thrust of this chapter:

"For I have set my face against this city for evil and not for good," says the Lord: "it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire." {Jer 21:10 RSV}

That should have been enough to upset this king and turn him around, but it was not. So in Chapter 22 God says to the prophet, "I want you to go up and talk to the king himself, face to face." This is the first time Jeremiah is sent to deliver a message to the face of the king himself:

Thus says the Lord: "Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and speak there this word, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O King of Judah, who sit on the throne of David, you and your servants, and your people who enter these gates.'" {Jer 22:1-2 RSV}

So Jeremiah goes down to the palace, and comes before the king himself. >From this point through the end of Chapter 25 is a record of the message Jeremiah gave before this king. We do not have time to read it all, but will pick out some of the highlights, because it is a great message in which Jeremiah is tracing before this king what has gone wrong in his nation. And as we face somewhat similar times in our own day, we can draw very helpful conclusions as to what is happening in our own times, in our own national life.

These ancient prophets, by the way, were not like court priests or preachers. This was not like having Billy Graham hold meetings for the President in the White House, nor even like having John Knox thunder away before Mary Queen of Scots, expounding the Scriptures. Rather, these prophets were sent with direct messages for these kings right from the mind of God.

So Jeremiah stands before the king with this message. The heart of it was that two areas of the national life were terribly wrong. Jeremiah sets these before the king in great power. The first area is summarized for us in Chapter 23, Verses 1-2:

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil doings," says the Lord. {Jer 23:1-2 RSV}

Who are these shepherds? They are the kings of the nation. Rulers and government leaders are the shepherds of God. You find all through the Old and the New Testaments that this idea is behind God's concept of government. Governmental leaders are to be shepherds of the people, watching over them and taking care of them. As we listen to this message developed here by the prophet, we will find in it a recognition of the proper tasks of government. What are governors and presidents and leaders for? Here you find the prophet setting this forth. In one great verse in Chapter 22, Verse 3, the prophet sets before us the task of government:

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. {Jer 22:3 RSV}

This is what this king, and others like him, had failed to do. Notice what they were to do. First, they were to set an example of justice and righteousness themselves. Rulers, leaders, and elected officials are to be an

example of righteousness and justice before the people. This is why it is so serious when politicians and elected officials do things which are wrong. People are saying today, "Why are we making such a fuss about Watergate? Everybody does this kind of thing -- men in business, leaders of industry -- why make such a fuss about it when politicians in Washington do the same?"

The answer is: Because every governmental leader, every politician elected or appointed to an official position in government, from the President on down in our own country, is, as Paul makes clear to us in Romans 13, a minister of God. He may not be a believer, but he himself is a minister, an agent of God, and is to represent God's standard of righteousness and judgment. Therefore, when these elected officials or leaders of the land -- kings or presidents or whatever they may be -- are guilty of wrongdoing, the effect of their wrongdoing is greatly intensified, is far greater than if they were just ordinary citizens. This is why the Watergate affair is a serious matter that our nation faces. And Jeremiah was sent to tell this king that this was what was wrong in his life. He had failed to correct the wrongs of the land, had failed to "deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who had been robbed", and had failed himself to be a pattern of justice and righteousness.

As you well know, we are facing an unprecedented situation in the United States. In just this last year, the Vice President of this nation has openly acknowledged that he was guilty of a felony, and has resigned from office. And dozens of other public officials, entrusted with great trust, have likewise confessed their involvement in wrongdoing. Now, we can understand many of the pressures they were under. We can sympathize with them for finding it difficult to see what was wrong. But nevertheless, their failure has become an open door which has introduced widespread dissension and evil into the land. This was what had gone wrong in Judah, and is what goes wrong with us.

Then the second thing that government leaders are to do: "Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless, and the widow." These are the minority groups in any country, the weak, the helpless. You will notice that the king is told here that it is his task to watch that he does no violence to them. Here is a recognition of the power of government to hurt the weak, a recognition that government finds it easy to do so in its management of events. Bureaucracy can grow up, making it easy to turn a deaf ear and to be unavailable to those who are really in trouble. And special care must be taken by any government to watch over the weak among them -- the aliens, the foreigners, those with different cultural patterns; and the widows; and the fatherless, the orphans -- those with no one to plead their cause. This is the task of government.

And the third responsibility of government leaders -- to keep the courts honest and just: "Do not shed innocent blood in this place." The task of government is to see that justice is available in a courtroom, that the guilty are found out and the innocent are freed, that innocent people are not punished wrongly by the court. This king had failed in this, and the prophet goes on to detail it for him in Verses 13 and following.

**Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
who makes his neighbor serve him for nothing,
and does not give him his wages;
who says, 'I will build myself a great house
with spacious upper rooms,'
and cuts out windows for it,
paneling it with cedar,
and painting it with vermilion. {Jer 22:13-14 RSV}**

Even in those days they had trouble with rulers embellishing their own private homes! And the amazing thing is that when this nation of Judah was bankrupt and in deep trouble, its treasures being looted from the temple and the city itself surrounded by an army, the king utilized his power and caused his subjects to build a house for him. Jeremiah says,

**Do you think you are a king
because you compete in cedar? {Jer 22:15a RSV}**

"Because you can build a bigger house than someone else, do you think that is what marks you as a king?" Then he refers him to the standard of his father, Josiah:

**Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.
He judged the cause of the poor and needy;
then it was well. [Then he asks this insightful question:]
Is not this to know me? says the Lord. {Jer 22:15b-16 RSV}**

That is what it means to know God -- to let your actions be changed by the knowledge you have of the God who watches over the needy and the weak.

Then the prophet gives us three bad examples of kings in Judah. In Verses 11-12 he refers to Shallum, which is another name for Jehoahaz, who went down to Egypt:

**"He shall return here no more, but in the place where they have carried him captive,
there shall he die, and he shall never see this land again." {Jer 22:11-12 RSV}**

Another example, one of the sons of Josiah, Jehoiakim, Verses 18-19:

**Therefore thus says the Lord concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:
"They shall not lament for him, saying,
'Ah my brother!' or 'Ah sister!'
They shall not lament for him, saying,
'Ah lord!' or 'Ah his majesty!' [Nobody is going to feel sorry when he is gone.]
With the burial of an ass he shall be buried,
dragged and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem." {Jer 22:18-19 RSV}**

Then still a third, Verses 24-25, here called Coniah, another name for Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim:

**As I live, says the Lord, "though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, were the
signet ring on my right hand, yet I would tear you off and give you into the hand of
those who seek your life, into the hand of those of whom you are afraid, even into the
hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans." {Jer
22:24-25 RSV}**

This man, young as he was, only 23 years old, though he had reigned only three months, was deposed and carried to Babylon, and spent the rest of a long life in captivity in Babylon. God says an amazing thing about him in Verse 30:

**Thus says the Lord:
"Write this man down as childless,
a man who shall not succeed in his days;
for none of his offspring shall succeed
in sitting on the throne of David,
and ruling again in Judah." {Jer 22:30 RSV}**

This is a very significant verse, for it means the end of the Solomonic line of succession. Up to this time, all the kings of Judah had been descendants of King Solomon, son of David. But with this man, that line of succession ended. No more was a man of that line allowed to rule on the throne of Judah. This affects the story of Jesus in the New Testament, for when you trace the genealogy of Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus, you discover that Joseph was the son of David through this man Coniah, or Jehoiachin, and thus had lost the right to sit on the throne of Judah. And had Jesus been his natural son, he never would have had the right to be king of Judah. But because he was the descendant of Mary, who was likewise a descendant of David, but through another son, Nathan, a brother of Solomon, Jesus therefore had the right to the throne of David. It is amazing how God ties history together and helps us to see how he works in marvelous ways we cannot anticipate!

Jeremiah now is given a vision of the true shepherd. For the first time in this great prophesy he does what you find frequently in Isaiah -- he lifts up his eyes, looks down through the centuries, and sees the coming of One

who would fulfil God's ideal, and on beyond that to the time when he will return again actually to carry it out in practice. Chapter 23, Verses 5-6:

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. [Lest we wonder who this would be, he tells us how to identify him.] And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness.'" {Jer 23:5-6 RSV}

That is the name applied to Jesus by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 1:30: "... Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption." He himself is our righteousness. So the prophet sees him coming as God's rightful king, and one day to come again so that "Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely."

So, corruption in government was the first area of national life which was wrong. But there is something worse yet, and the prophet is led now to speak of it, Verses 9 and following:

**Concerning the prophets:
My heart is broken within me,
all my bones shake;
I am like a drunken man,
like a man overcome by wine,
because of the Lord
and because of his holy words.
For the land is full of adulterers;
because of the curse the land mourns,
and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. {Jer 23:9-10a RSV}**

What is wrong? Well, back of the king was the prophet. It is bad enough when the king goes wrong, but when the preachers who are there to correct the king go wrong, there is no hope for that land. And here were the prophets, who should have set the king right, but they were prophesying and preaching the wrong things. So there was a fatal cancer at the heart of this nation which could not be cured. That is why judgment had to come. God says in Verse 15:

**Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets:
"Behold, I will feed them with wormwood,
and give them poisoned water to drink;
for from the prophets of Jerusalem
ungodliness has gone forth into all the land." {Jer 23:15 RSV}**

We wonder what has happened in America. We wonder where our national strength has gone, why we seem to grow weaker and weaker instead of stronger and stronger, why, when we have the greatest military might the world has ever known, we exercise less and less influence among the nations of earth. Why? Well, you cannot explain it merely by looking at government. Behind the government, you see, is the church. Every land, eventually, is governed by what is going on in the church, by what is going on among the people of God. That is why Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world." Paul says of the church, "You are the pillar and ground of the truth." Ultimately, truth rests right there with what is going on among the people of God, and among the preachers of the people of God.

Jeremiah points out some of the things which were wrong among the~ preachers. these prophets. First, Verse 16:

Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes: ..." {Jer 23:16a RSV}

"That is the first thing which has gone wrong -- they are filling you with vain hopes, telling you things are going to be all right when they are not all right. They preach messages which make it sound as if man is going to work out his difficulties and everything is going to be fine -- we can count on it. Ultimately these problems

are going to be solved,' they say. But they are vain hopes." Why? Well, secondly, he reveals,

"... they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord." {Jer 23:16b RSV}

That is why they are vain hopes. They are just their own ideas of what is happening in the nation, their own subjective viewpoints of what is wrong in life, their own opinions and religious ideas. And that is all they are worth. They have not sat and listened to the voice of God. Verse 18 says,

**For who among them has stood in the council of the Lord
to perceive and to hear his word,
or who has given heed to his word and listened? {Jer 23:18 RSV}**

That is what was wrong with the prophets -- they were preaching themselves, not God. And that is what has happened in America. Turn back the record forty or fifty years ago in this nation, to the time when there came in a tremendous onslaught of a theological movement known as "German Rationalism," and preachers began to turn from the Scriptures and to preach their own messages. The amazing thing is that this has been true not only of what we call "liberal" churches, but of many evangelicals, as well.

We have just finished a pastor's seminar at this church, with fifteen men from all over the nation. We studied the Word of God together and learned what God is saying today to men and women, to the people of this land, and learned about the resources and the tremendous basis of operation that God has made available to us. At the close of the seminar the pastors were asked to give their evaluation of what had happened to them. It was interesting to me to see how many of these men expressed anger at the fact that in their previous training they had learned little or nothing of how to teach the Scriptures. They shook their heads and said, "Why didn't we learn this in school? Why weren't we taught this?" And they were angry, literally angry, because as they looked back on their own ministries they found that they had been giving out their own ideas, and had never been taught to expound the Word of God, to stand in the council of God, and to hear his word. That is what wrecks a nation, because then there is no correction of the evils of government. Look at what happens next, Verse 17. They give false assurances:

"They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, 'It shall be well with you'; and to every one who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'" {Jer 23:17 RSV}

That is what we are hearing today, is it not? The "new morality" tell us, "Don't worry, young people. If you love each other you can do anything you want and nothing will happen. No evil will befall you." Prophets of today are saying to our generation, "You can run off with your neighbor's wife, you can cheat on your income tax, you can do all these things and you don't have to worry about it. No evil is going to fall, no harmful results will come." And that is why a nation begins to fall apart and lose its national strength.

The last thing, Verses 31-32 -- they claimed the very authority of God:

"Behold, I am against the prophets, says the Lord, who use their tongues and say, 'Says the Lord.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the Lord, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the Lord." {Jer 23:31-32 RSV}

They claimed God's authority to say all these things, said, "God said this," when God did not say it at all. And that is what hurts a nation. That is what eats its heart out and allows its people to rot, to fall apart morally and become corrupt, because there is no faithful word from God.

Now the prophet draws the contrast of the true ministry. What should the ministry of God be? Chapter 23 tells us, beginning with Verse 21. The first thing a preacher should do is to stand before God:

I did not send the prophets,

**yet they ran;
I did not speak to them,
yet they prophesied.
But if they had stood in my council,
then they would have proclaimed my words to my people,
and they would have turned them from their evil way,
and from the evil of their doings. {Jer 23:21-22 RSV}**

A man has to stand before God and hear God speak to him, first. That is the first thing. I remember that years ago when I came here as a pastor, I found I was preaching messages I had more or less borrowed from great Bible teachers -- not taking them verbatim, but leaning heavily upon the ministry of men whom I admired. Every young man does that as he starts out in the ministry. But gradually I learned that God had to say something to my heart first, that I could not borrow somebody else's fire. It had to be fire in my own soul, something God was saying to me, or it could never set fire in the hearts of other people. This is what God says is paramount -- we must stand in his council and hear his words. Then what? Verse 28:

"Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully." {Jer 23:28 RSV}

That is the business of a preacher -- to take what God has said and set it before the people without diluting it, to say faithfully what God has said, for that is what will save a nation from hurt and preserve it from harm. God goes on to show what can be accomplished by it, Verse 29:

"Is not my word like a fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" {Jer 23:29 RSV}

... Not with judgment, not with harshness -- God never does that -- but pounding away with honesty and realism, setting before people exactly what is happening, exactly where they are, so that they might see the loving heart of God, desiring to turn a nation around from what is disintegrating it, tearing it apart.

And so, in the last section of this great message, found in chapter 24 and 25, which we will not take time to read, by referring back to a message he had given earlier to another king, the prophet is telling this king how to react when God is judging a people or a nation. How do you react when you are under the chastisement of God, when God has found that the only way he can get through to you is to bring trouble into your life, to catch you up short. Then what are you to do? This is what the prophet sets before the king -- three things that he is to remember.

The first, in Chapter 24, is to accept the judging hand of God as the very best hope for you. In this chapter the prophet was shown a vision of two big baskets of figs. This is one of those visual aids God so helpfully employs. One was a basket of good figs, the other of rotten, stinking, smelly figs. God said, "These figs are like the people. The good figs are those who are to be carried captive to Babylon." That is astonishing, because if you had lived in Judah in those days, you would have said, "The worst thing that could happen to me would be to be taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar and carried away from this land into Babylon." But God would have said to you, "You are absolutely wrong! That is the best thing that could happen to you." In fact, look at what he says, Verse 6:

"I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord; and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart." {Jer 24:6-7 RSV}

"This is what will cure them," he says. "This will set them straight." So that what looked like the worst thing to them, was the best thing in God's eyes. "But if you stay in this land," he says, "if you are not carried captive, that will be the worst thing that could happen to you." For he says in Verse 9,

"I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. And I will send sword,

famine, and pestilence upon them, until they shall be utterly destroyed from the land which I gave to them and their fathers." {Jer 24:9-10 RSV}

So God's admonition is to accept what he is doing with you as the best thing for you, and know that his love will triumph.

The second thing he sets before the king, the second principle we are to learn from this, is that we are to await the measured end that God has in view. The prophet refers to a previous message and he says to this king, Verses 11-12,

"This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, says the Lord, making the land an everlasting waste." {Jer 25:11-12 RSV}

That was a specified period of time: seventy years. As we know from other Scriptures, this was the length of time that Israel had failed to allow the land to enjoy its sabbath. For four hundred and ninety years they had lived in this land, and not once did they ever observe the sabbatical year, to let the land lie fallow for one year. So seventy of those sabbatical years had stacked up, and God said, "I will send you to Babylon for seventy years, while the land enjoys its sabbath for the seventy years you have failed to allow it to do so." God always has a time limit on what he does with us. Remember the fellow who said, "My favorite Scripture is where it says, 'And it came to pass...' It is such a comfort to know that it didn't come to stay; it came to pass!" It will pass. And so, under the hand of God's judgment, wait out his measured time, knowing that it shall come to Pass.

The third and last principle the chapter gives us is that God says the prophet is to expect a widening circle of cleansing, beginning with Judah, but reaching out to all the nations around. And in two vivid figures he describes how God works. It is like a cup which you drink from, then pass it to your neighbor and he drinks from it, who in turn gives it to another neighbor. And so the cup is sent around all the nations, first making them drunk with the judgment of God, but also bringing them into repentance before God. The king is told, Verse 29,

"For behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by my name, and shall you go unpunished?" {Jer 25:29a RSV}

And as God begins to work in your life, you know that others also are going to be subjected to the same judgment as you, and they will learn from you. God's cleansing hand will reach out. It is finally described as a great and mighty storm:

**"Thus says the Lord of Hosts:
Behold, evil is going forth
from nation to nation,
and a great tempest is stirring
from the farthest parts of the earth! {Jer 25:32 RSV}**

It is going to keep on building up into a great and mighty storm which will bring at last the final judgment of God. It may be that we are in those days, and God is judging his people today. "The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God," says Peter {1 Pet 4:17 KJV}. And as we are subjected to it -- our hearts searched and our minds open before God -- and we are brought to repentance and to confession and to turning from our evil in the church of God, that judgment is going to reach out to the nation around, and to nations beyond. And God's great judgment storm will come to pass when at last all the fearsome scenes of Revelation are brought before us, in order that the world may be cleansed, and God can begin the new heavens and the new earth which are promised to us. That is what God is doing. We are part of a great, mighty, sweeping movement of God in the history of this day, and we ought to bow before him and give grateful thanks that we are in his hands, the God of mercy.

Prayer:

"Lord God of hosts, be with us yet, lest we forget, lest we forget." May our minds and hearts be open to understand what you are doing in the nations of our day, Lord. And help us, who are members of the household of God, to bow before you and let you search our hearts, and remove the iniquity that is among us, that we may be a clean people, vessels fit for the Master's use. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

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