

SUBJECT: THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

TITLE: WHEN HE SAYS "I WILL"

TEXT: JEREMIAH 12:14-17; 13:1-7; 24:1-10; 21:1-10

INTRODUCTION. You may have heard a statement I remember from my youth. Someone asks a man, "Can you do thus and so?" He responds, "I am ready, willing, and able." There is nothing like a good attitude, is there? To bring it more up to date, we appreciate a positive mental attitude. Of course that brings up another question: what kind of attitude is there other than a mental attitude?

During the rise of the New Age Movements, Norman Vincent Peale introduced us to The Power of Positive Thinking. I believe it was Paul Yogi Cho who introduced us to Positive Imagining. There are major flaws in both theories. Today, I would like for us to focus on something far superior to man's "Ready, willing, and able," something that transcends man's power of positive thinking, or his so-called positive imaging.

All serious students of the Word of God are familiar with the three great names for God in the Old Testament. First, there is the word Elohim (God), which we find in Genesis 1:1, denoting the One Who had the power to create all things just we are told in the first Chapter of Genesis (and if your god could not do that you had better get you a new God). The second name for God is Adonai, translated Lord (Capital "L" and lower case "o r d"). This word implies sovereignty. The God who created all things is the sovereign Lord who has the right to reign over all He created. Ultimately, His sovereignty will be recognized by all in heaven, as well as all in hell. There will be no person, no angel, and no demon who will be able to deny His sovereignty.

The third name for God is Yahweh, which He reveals as, "I AM". When you are reading the Old Testament and come to the word LORD (all caps), you know it is the Hebrew word Yahweh (YHWH). I discussed this word with a Hebrew scholar, the late Dr. Leo Eddleman, many years ago and he helped me broaden my understand of this name for God. I stated that it means, "I am that which I am, I was that which I was, and I will be that which I will be." He said, "In the fullest sense it means more than that. He is not only the source of His own existence, he is the source of your existence."

Today, I would like for you to look with me at a theme which touches on all three names for God, as well as the principles they convey. The great I AM often delivers a great "I will" in Jeremiah. Read this great prophecy and hear the sovereign Lord declare, I will - I will - I will - I will! The Sovereignty God has the right to say, "I will." God has the power to convert the I will to I can. "So be it!" The Great I AM can and will do that which is consistent with His character and nature.

I. GOD SAYS, "I WILL UPROOT THE HOUSE OF JUDAH," JER. 12:14-17.

A. We Need to Review the background.

God called Abraham when he was still in the land of Ur of the Chaldees and told him to leave the land of his fathers and to a land He would give to him and to his descendants: the Promised Land. God entered a covenant with Abraham that included a land, many descendants, and One who would bless the nations of the world. This covenant was continued through his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel. A Famine in the land forced Jacob and his sons and their families to go down to Egypt, where he had lifted up Joseph, one of Jacob's son as a powerful associate of the Pharaoh. Joseph made arrangements for the Israelites, 70 in number, to live in the fertile Land of Goshen. Four hundred, thirty years later, God sent Moses to deliver Israel from an Egypt that had was no longer hospitable, but unmercifully oppressive.

God led the to Mount Sinai where He entered a covenant relationship with them. Because of their unfaithfulness, God caused them to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, until all those twenty and over had died. Then, He used replaced Moses with Joshua, who led in the conquest of Canaan, the land flowing with milk and honey.

For the next three hundred years, the Israelites, now twelve tribes, went through a five point cycle over and over:

- 1) They turned from God to idols and all the sins associated with idolatry.
- 2) God sent an oppressor to judge His people.
- 3) They cried out to God for deliverance.
- 4) God send a judge to deliver them.
- 5) They lived in peace until that judge died - then started the cycle all over again.

Eventually, the people demanded a king, to whom they looked to raise an army to protect them from the Philistines. If they depended on God to protect them, they would have to obey Him - and their record in that department was abysmal. God gave them Saul, who rejected God and found him and his house rejected by God. Then the Lord send Samuel to anoint David king over Israel. David was a king like no other in the entire history of the world. He never bowed a knee to a false god. That could not be said of any other king since Melchizedek, the priest/king of Salem. He became the standard by which all future kings would be judged.

David was followed by his son Solomon, who requested wisdom when the Lord gave him a choice, and received both wisdom and wealth. Solomon built the famous temple for the Lord, but in the end opened the nation to idolatry through marriages to foreign women. Solomon was followed by his son Rehoboam, who arrogantly refused to lighten the load on the people and saw ten of the twelve tribes follow Jeroboam I in revolting against him. At this point we follow the divided kingdoms, Israel, the Northern Ten Tribes, and Judah, made up of Judah and Benjamin in the south. The northern kingdom never knew a godly king, but God sent prophets like Elijah and Elisha, and finally, in the Eighty Century B. C., He sent Amos and Hosea to warn them that if they did not repent God would destroy the nation. They refused and God raised up the Assyrians under Sargon II to invade the land and take away a large segment of the people to be settled in other countries. He brought foreigners back to Israel and settled them in the land - the Samaritans came from the amalgamation that followed (they intermarried with other Semitic people who had been settled there by the Assyrians).

At the same time, the Golden Era of prophecy, the Eighth Century B.C., God sent Isaiah and Micah to warn Judah that if they did not repent and follow the Lord, they would be oppressed by Assyria. If they still did not repent, God would raise up the Babylonians to take them into captivity for seventy years. They refused to repent and they had been overrun by the Babylonians in 606 B.C, at which time Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Obednigo, and many other captives were taken back to Babylon. They rebelled against Babylon and suffered a second deportation in 597 B.C. The final assault would come in 586 B. C., at which time Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed.

B. God Has a Specific Warning for Judah and Her Neighbors .

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Concerning all My evil neighbors who attack the inheritance that I bequeathed to My people, Israel, I am about to uproot them from their land, and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them. After I have uprooted them, I will once again have compassion on them and return each one to his inheritance and to his land. If they will diligently learn the ways of My people—to swear by My name, ‘As the Lord lives,’ just as they taught My people to swear by Baal—they will be built up among My people. However, if they will not obey, then I will uproot and destroy that nation.’ This is the Lord’s declaration” (Jer. 12:14-17, HCSB).

1. God would uproot both Judah and their neighbors, 12:14.

Judah had not driven out all the pagan people as God commanded during the conquest, and those neighbors had seduced God’s covenant people to commit idolatry and all the sins associated with Baal and other false gods. Now, God warns that when He sends the Babylonians to defeat Judah and carry them into captivity, they would be uprooted with them.

2. Afterwards, He would restore His people, 12:15-16.

At the end of seventy years, God would have compassion on His people and restore them to the land and continue His covenant with them. The Bible Knowledge Commentary offers a brief summary of these verses: “Jeremiah closed his fourth message by giving God’s promise/threat to the nations. Those wicked neighbors who had seized Israel’s inheritance (cf. vv. 7-9) would themselves be uprooted from their lands (cf. 25:12-14, 27-29; 46-51). In contrast God would later uproot the house of Judah from these Gentile.” nations where they had been scattered and would restore them to their land (cf. 31:7-11; Ezek. 37:1-14).

“This promise applies to Judah, as well as to the other nations specified (Amos 9:14). If these neighbors during their exile repent of their sin and call on God, they, like Israel (Deut. 4:29-31), will receive God’s compassion and he will return them to their respective lands: Moab (cf. 48:47) and Ammon (cf. 49:6)” [New Commentary on the Whole Bible].

These people had taught Israel to swear by Baal, but now they would be given an opportunity to call upon the name of the God of Israel, that is, to confess solemnly the true God (4:2; cf. Isa. 19:18; 65:16).

“Israel had learned to swear by Baal and other local deities from these neighboring nations. Now the hope is that these nations would learn to evoke the name of Yahweh. then shall they be built—They will prosper spiritually and physically alongside God’s people Israel. in the midst of my people—These nations will then be in the midst of the Jews, a reversal of the former situation” [New Commentary on the Whole Bible].

3. He adds, “If they will not obey, then I will uproot and destroy that nation.”

God offers mercy to those who genuinely repent. He will not be deceived by a false commitment or by hypocrisy. If they do not obey Him He will uproot and destroy them.

4. Here is the great “I will” - “This is the Lord’s declaration.”

Two things: never overlook the significance of a statement like this. This is the declaration of the Lord, not Jeremiah, the king, or any other person. In the second place, never overlook the repetition in the Word of God. We are going to see this over and over: “I will, I will, I will.”

II. GOD SAYS, “I WILL RUIN THE PRIDE OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM,” Jer. 13:1-10.

A. God Gives Jeremiah Another Illustration of His Sovereign Will, 13:1-7.

1. The Lord gave Jeremiah instructions (13: 1-2).

“This is what the Lord said to me: ‘Go and buy yourself linen underwear and put it on, but don’t get it wet.’ So I bought underwear as the Lord instructed me and put it on.”

Various translations use different words for the linen underwear: sash, linen belt, or linen girdle. This may seem like a strange command at first but it is a dramatic portrayal of the filth that had invaded the hearts and lives of God’s chosen people. Some have suggested that this garment may have been a belt or sash worn around the outside of one’s robe. Others, and I think they are right, see this as an undergarment. It may have been a wide sash worn as an undergarment that extended from the waist to the mid-thigh, something that would cover the wearer’s loins. The idea here is that the undergarment was meant to express the close intimacy which existed between God and the covenant people, Judah. Jeremiah was told to buy a linen garment. In Israel, linen was worn by the priests, a reminder that the nation was a priestly nation.

2. “Then the word of the Lord came to me a second time” (13:3-4).

“Take the underwear that you bought and are wearing, and go at once to the Euphrates River and hide it in a rocky crevice.’ So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the Lord commanded me.”

After Jeremiah had worn the linen undergarment for a time, God told him to take it to the Euphrates and hide it in a crevice in the rocks. Many believe Jeremiah walked to the Euphrates

River, a round-trip journey of about 700 miles, to bury this undergarment. Others point out another possibility, that Jeremiah was told to travel to the village of Parah, about three miles northeast of his home at Anathoth (Josh. 18:21, 23). A deep wadi, or dry stream bed except during the rainy season would fit the description of a place with crevices and rocks. In Hebrew the spelling for “to Parah” and “to Euphrates” are identical. “By using a location so close to home the people were able to observe Jeremiah’s symbolic actions, and the similarity of name would remind the nation of the army from the Euphrates that was coming to destroy them” [Bible Knowledge Commentary]. Whether Jeremiah was told to go to the Euphrates or to Parah, three miles away, the point is that God told him what to do and he was obedient.

Who has not found some old piece of clothing that has been lost in a field or in the woods and pulled it from earth, leaves, and debris covering it? It is absolutely filthy, and the thought of wearing it is repulsive. This is what Judah had become to God.

3. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a third time (13: 5-7).

“A long time later the Lord said to me, ‘Go at once to the Euphrates and get the underwear that I commanded you to hide there.’ So I went to the Euphrates and dug up the underwear and got it from the place where I had hidden it, but it was ruined—of no use whatsoever.”

After Jeremiah had worn the undergarment for a long time, the Lord told him to go back and retrieve it from its hiding place where he had buried it. This would have meant

“Another round-trip walk of 700 miles would have been necessary if Parath is the Euphrates! This adds further support to the view that the place where Jeremiah was sent was the nearby village of Parah.) As he dug up the sash he found that its exposure to the elements had made it completely useless. The garment had rotted” [BKC].

4. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a fourth time (13:8-9).

“Then the word of the Lord came to me: ‘This is what the Lord says: Just like this I will ruin the great pride of both Judah and Jerusalem.’”

Just as the undergarment was ruined by being buried for an extended period of time, He was about to ruin both the nation of Judah and its capitol city, Jerusalem.

B. God Reveals the Purpose in His Object Lesson, 13:10.

“These evil people, who refuse to listen to Me, who walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts, and who have followed other gods to serve and worship—they will be like this underwear, of no use whatsoever” (13:10).

The people of Judah had persisted in their rebellion against the Lord. They had repeatedly refused to repent. They insisted that they would not obey Him - they would do what they wanted to do. They refused to listen to Him. He calls them evil people, but not without reason:

- 1) They refuse to listen to Him.
- 2) They walk in stubbornness.
- 3) They follow other gods and worshiped them.
- 4) They are like this rotted undergarment.
- 5) They are altogether useless to Him.

III. GOD WILL BLESS THE GOOD AND CURSE THE BAD, JER. 24:1-10.

A. Jeremiah Is Shown a Basket of Good Figs and a Basket of Bad Figs, 24:1-3.

The time here is 597 B.C. Zedekiah has rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar and the king of Babylon has sent his army against Judah once again, as he had in 606 B.C. God is about to cause a second group of captives to go into captivity in Babylon.

“After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had deported Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, the officials of Judah, and the craftsmen and metal smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord. One basket contained very good figs, like early figs, but the other basket contained very bad figs, so bad they were inedible. The Lord said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ I said, ‘Figs! The good figs are very good, but the bad figs are extremely bad, so bad they are inedible’ (24:1-3).

The Lord shows Jeremiah two baskets of figs. One basket is filled with very good figs. The other is filled with extremely bad figs. They were so bad they were inedible.

B. God Explains the Basket of Good Figs, 24:4-7.

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Like these good figs, so I regard as good the exiles from Judah I sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. I will keep My eyes on them for their good and will return them to this land. I will build them up and not demolish them; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They will be My people, and I will be their God because they will return to Me with all their heart.’”

The great I AM has once again said, “I will.” I will, I will, I will. This is consistent with His holy nature and character. It is within His power, and it is within His will. If these people will obey Him He is determined to bless them. He does not leave anything to chance, or to the human effort. He says,

- 1) I will keep My eyes on them for their good.
- 2) I will “return them to this land” (Judah).
- 3) I will build them up and not demolish them.
- 4) “I will give them a heart to know Me.”
- 5) “I will be their God because they will return to Me with all their heart.”

C. God Explains the Basket of Bad Figs, 24:8-10.

“But as for the bad figs, so bad they are inedible, this is what the Lord says: in this way I will deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem—those remaining in this land and those living in the land of Egypt. I will make them an object of horror and disaster to all the kingdoms of the earth, a disgrace, an object of scorn, ridicule, and cursing, wherever I have banished them. I will send the sword, famine, and plague against them until they have perished from the land I gave to them and their ancestors.”

Now, let us briefly review the I wills in these verses. God will bless those who obey Him, but He will deal harshly with those who reject him. Just as rotten figs will be rejected, so will He reject those who refuse to follow Him. He says:

- 1) I will deal with Zedekiah, kings Judah.
- 2) I will make them an object of horror and disaster
- 3) I will send the sword, famine, and plague against them.

IV. GOD SAYS, “I WILL FIGHT AGAINST YOU,” JER. 21:1-10.

A. He Rebuffs Their False Hopes of Deliverance, 21:1-7

The date is 587 B.C. and the city is under siege. King Zedekiah and the people of Judah had arrogantly refused to obey God, and now that they are under siege they resort to wishful thinking - maybe the Lord will still spare us. They reject Jeremiah, hate him, they seek to kill him, now they ask him to intercede for them. Here is God’s Answer:

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent Pashhur son of Malchijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah, asking, ‘Ask the Lord on our behalf, since Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is making war against us. Perhaps the Lord will perform for us something like all His past wonderful works so that Nebuchadnezzar will withdraw from us.’ But Jeremiah answered, ‘This is what you are to say to Zedekiah: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I will repel the weapons of war in your hands, those you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall, and I will bring them into the center of this city. I will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, with anger, rage, and great wrath. I will strike the residents of this city, both man and beast. They will die in a great plague. Afterwards’—this is the Lord’s declaration—‘King Zedekiah of Judah, his officers, and the people—those in this city who survive the plague, the sword, and the famine—I will hand over to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, to their enemies, yes, to those who want to take their lives. He will put them to the sword; he won’t spare them or show pity or compassion’” (JER. 21:1-7).

B. God Will Hand Jerusalem Over to Babylon, 21:8-10

“But you must say to this people, ‘This is what the Lord says: Look, I am presenting to you the way of life and the way of death. Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine,

and plague, but whoever goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live and will retain his life like the spoils of war. For I have turned against this city to bring disaster and not good’—this is the Lord’s declaration. ‘It will be handed over to the king of Babylon, who will burn it down” (Jer 21:8-10).

CONCLUSION . The great I AM has spoken over and over. He says, I will bless those who follow Me and judge those who refuse to follow me. The One who continually says, “I will, I will, I will”, is the one who has the sovereign right to speak, the One who has the power to accomplish anything He wills to do.

Now, “This is what the Lord says: Look, I am presenting to you the way of life and the way of death.” This is your invitation right now. Trust Him and receive His blessings. Refuse to follow Him and know that He will judge you. God says, “I will , I will, I will.” Now let me ask you - will you trust Jesus Christ as your Savior. Will you crown Him as the Lord of your life? Will you say, “Yes, Lord, I will follow you right now.”