

Jeremiah

Dayton Keese



“Like Clay in the Potter’s Hands”

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Jeremiah

by

Dayton Keesee

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Jeremiah

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This Book is Dedicated to:

all the former students of SIBI who sat at the feet
of Dayton Keesee learning of the great
love and concern God had for the people of Israel
and to all those yet learning through
video instruction being given by Dayton.



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A companion workbook on the study of Jeremiah by Dayton Keesee is available for purchase through Sunset international Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

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Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for an effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of a practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a worldwide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now, in printed form, that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff, and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project.

This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of the Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation/Editing Center who edited the manuscripts, and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible

Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.

Jeremiah, Prophet of Justice and Judgment

Introduction

The Book of Jeremiah is about a man of monumental spiritual stature. This prophetic book is the longest of the Old Testament. Jeremiah did not do anything in miniature. His prophecies pronounced God's justice and judgment on at least twenty different countries and cities (cf. Jeremiah 25:18–28). He started while young and continued for more than forty years with *“Thus saith the LORD”* indictments that were delivered to kings and princes, false prophets, priests, and people of every level of life. He even delivered a special promise from God to an Ethiopian slave, who befriended him (cf. Jeremiah 39:15–18), and yet pronounced judgment and calamity on the world empire of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 51:59–64).

There was nothing placid nor passive about the prophetic life of Jeremiah. He was a warrior in love with righteousness and a human whose heart vibrated with fleshly feelings founded on faith. There is no way one can place his message and mission in the normal category. His message came straight from heaven and his mission was a declaration of doom and desolation for the masses who lived in his day.

Anyone preparing to study the Book of Jeremiah needs to recognize that he is about to launch into one of the most divine adventures and stimulating studies found in sacred scripture. J.D. Douglas wrote “It is no exaggeration to say that in order to understand what the Old Testament means by the term

“*prophet*,” it is necessary to study the Book of Jeremiah.”¹ Thus Jeremiah presents a standard and a scope that one needs to follow. Note the statement made by Theo Laetsch, “By the grace of God he became a tower of strength and a real man’s man.”²

Jeremiah was one of God’s outstanding heroes. Not once did he break down in public facing his own people. He was invariably a man of God, the messenger of the LORD’s mercy, calling a nation he loved to repentance with a love as tender as that of a mother. Jeremiah was as sincere as a faithful friend, one who would stick closer than a brother. His love for his people, however, did not interfere with his sense of duty. His love and obedience toward God were always in the forefront. And so he pronounced God’s judgment upon an impenitent person without respect of persons. Concerning Jeremiah and his dedication, Laetsch adds further:

. . . like walls of brass he stood firm against frenzied prophets, fanatic priests, frantic people, furious kings, and calmly he faced this pack of snarling wolves ready to murder him. And neither defamation nor persecution nor imprisonment nor threats of death kept him from speaking whatever God commanded. Only when alone with himself and with God did he voice the agonizing feelings his doubt, his fears, his heartaches, and his gnawing grief.³

¹ Douglas, J.D., The Illustrated Bible Dictionary Vol 2, Inter-Varsity Press, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton Illinois, 1980. p. 745.

² Laetsch, Theo., Bible Commentary: Jeremiah, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1965, p. xi.

³ Laetsch, p. xi.

All of this information raises the question what does this mean to Christians in the twenty-first century? It means that Jeremiah was an individual who hurt like other people hurt, but more. He was lonely like others, but more so. He was one who watched deterioration and desolation literally surround him. Christians today may have faced some of this kind of hardship, but he faced so much more. He witnessed the ravages of war and captivity to the point that he was carried away by the evil forces. Some today may have faced the same kind of trial, perhaps even to the point of being involved in such things, but he faced it all to a higher degree. Who among Christians today can say they have walked among the same kinds of peril and been stricken as Jeremiah? Who among us today can walk through the peril stricken pages of the Book of Jeremiah and see him persevere for God without feeling a surge of courage to do the same? J. Sidlow Baxter in his writing, Explore The Book stated:

All disappointed, dis-appreciated, disregarded, misunderstood, misrepresented, and persecuted Christian workers today, sticking on at their work with a laden weight at their heart and a choke of grief in their throat, should turn again and again to these pages to commune with the heroic, great heart of that book.⁴

It is impossible to study the Book of Jeremiah without studying Jeremiah himself. There are strands of thought and channels of truth flowing through the book about him. Some have mighty messages, and some practical points that are too pertinent and precious to be ignored. This chapter will focus on pursuing some of those channels of truths before continuing the

⁴ Baxter, J. Sidlow, Explore the Book (Six Volumes in One), Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Volume III, 1974: p. 259–260.

study of the Book of Jeremiah in a chapter by chapter and verse by verse.

The Period of Jeremiah's Prophecies

*The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at **Anathoth** in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile (Jeremiah 1:1–3).*

Jeremiah lived at Anathoth, which was a little village about two and a half miles North East of Jerusalem. In other portions of the Book of Jeremiah, it is recorded that he also lived in Jerusalem (cf. Jeremiah 29:1; 32:2–3, 7–9; 38:6, 13; 39:14). This limited territory of Judah is where he spent most of his prophetic life. Jeremiah began his prophetic work in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. Josiah reigned from 640 to 609 B.C. for a total of thirty-one years as king. This would mean that Jeremiah began his prophetic work in 627 B.C. and continued through four other kings over a period of forty years.

Jehoahaz (Shallum), the son of Josiah, only reigned for three months before he was taken to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho. Necho made another of Josiah's sons, Jehoiakim, king and he reigned for eleven years from 609–598 B.C. Jehoiachin (Coniah), the son of Jehoiakim, reigned as king for only three months before he was taken into Babylonian captivity. Then the last king was Zedekiah, who reigned eleven years from 597–586 B.C. The last four kings of Judah were corrupt and did evil in the eyes of the LORD. Each one of them carried on the tradition of idolatry and shame that had been active in the land for too many years. Only Josiah served God and the people.

The wide spread idolatry in Judah actually began in the days of Solomon at 1000 B.C. Solomon loved many foreign women and his wives turned his heart after other gods:

He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites . . . Solomon built a high place for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and for Molech . . . (1 Kings 11:5).

Jeroboam, who was the first king of the Northern Kingdom when the kingdom was divided, set up two golden calves at Bethel and Dan and the areas often referred to as Samaria and the kingdom of Israel (cf. 1 Kings 12:28–33). Such was the condition of the kingdom of Judah in which Jeremiah had to labor.

In the Book of Jeremiah there are numerous chapters dealing with Jehoiakim when he tried to kill Jeremiah, and he cut up Jeremiah's scroll and threw it in the fire (cf. Jeremiah 26–36). During the reign of Zedekiah the kingdom failed in its final form. Because of his weaknesses, he failed as a man, a husband, a father, and a king.

Just the two kings, Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, reigned for twenty-two years and their corrupt conduct affected Jeremiah's labor and work in Judah. In this kind of atmosphere, the very nature of a man, working for God in the midst of these people who neither appreciated him nor respected him, can be seen. Jeremiah was called to live in a corrupted rut that was one-dimensional plunge down into destruction and desolation. How would a Christian fare in that kind of environment today? What kind of attitude would he have after working year after year for forty years in that kind of conflict? What would that kind of challenge do to one's faith? How hard was it for Jeremiah to stay focused with those people? Jeremiah was faithful through it all and that is one of the truths found throughout the book. It is a truth that needs to be a lesson for Christians today.

The Structure and Style of Jeremiah's Prophecies

The structure and style of the Book of Jeremiah are another channel to consider in the study of Jeremiah. Clyde T. Francisco stated in his Studies in Jeremiah that the arrangements of materials in the Book of Jeremiah are the most confused in the Old Testament.⁵ Some critics and skeptics have made great play of these factors, some have doubted that he wrote part of the book, and even some believe that Jeremiah never did a number of the things mentioned in the book. I am not going to take any time now trying to answer the skeptics and critics. That would be like taking the law, putting it over into the hands of the lawless, and then from that trying to arrive at truth. They would be far better off studying what is there rather than being so concerned about a few chronological changes in some of the chapters because not all chapters are in sequence. In order to illustrate the fact that they have over emphasized the problems, note the outline of Jeremiah below. It illustrates the great harmony and symmetry in the Book of Jeremiah.

OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

- I. **Introduction (Ch. 1)**
- II. **Prophecies Against Judah and Jerusalem (Chs. 2–45)**
 - A. **God's Charge to the Prophet Received and Carried Out (Chs. 2–25)**
 - B. **The Reaction of the People to the Prophet (Chs. 26–36)**

⁵ Francisco, Clyde T., Studies in Jeremiah, Convention Press. Nashville, Tennessee, 1961, p. 145.

- C. God's Promise Fulfilled by the Desolation and Destruction in Judah (Chs. 37–45)
- III. **Jeremiah's Prophecies Against the Nations** (Chs. 46–51)
 - A. Egypt (Ch. 46)
 - B. Philistia, Tyre, Sidon (Ch. 47)
 - C. Moab (Ch. 48)
 - D. Ammon (49:1–6)
 - E. Edom (49:7–22)
 - F. Damascus (49:23–27)
 - G. Kedar and Hazor (49:28–33)
 - H. Elam – including Media (49:34–39)
 - I. Babylon (Chs. 50–51)
- IV. **A Review of Judah's Ruin** (Ch. 52)

The Book of Jeremiah truly does start out with an “Introduction” which introduces the whole book in Jeremiah 1. Everything that is listed under “Prophecies Against Judah and Jerusalem” is introduced in Jeremiah 1 including “God’s Charge to the Prophet,” “The Reaction of the People,” and God’s Promise Fulfilled.” That kind of symmetry and harmony does not happen in a book of confusion.

The next section in the outline of Jeremiah consists of the “Prophecies Against the Nations” covering Jeremiah 46–51. Notice that in Jeremiah 1:9–10 God said:

*... “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over **nations and kingdoms** to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”*

The prophecies against the nations are previewed in Jeremiah 1 and then revealed in Jeremiah 46–51 as Jeremiah spoke of God’s judgment upon Egypt, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Hazor, Elam, Media, and Babylon. Babylon is the nation that is mentioned the most in

this book other than Judah. Babylon is the nation that conquered Judah and carried her inhabitants into captivity. The last chapters of the Book of Jeremiah give very graphic details of the internal corruption and what Babylon had done to God's children to cause Babylon's downfall before it happened. Finally, Jeremiah 52 is a review of Judah's ruin.

Look at the harmony and symmetry that are part of the Book of Jeremiah. There are large blocks of material that are in chronological order. Some chapters are inserted out of the chronological order, but this is not a problem when the specific reason is noted for why certain chapters are located where they are. This book needs to be studied for the message God has given in the book.

James Smith, in his commentary Jeremiah and Lamentation, points out some of the teaching patterns of Jeremiah.⁶ He lists fourteen different animals that Jeremiah used in nineteen references. There are eleven references to plants, six references to farmers and farming, and six more references to the wonders of nature (oceans, vapors, rain, and lightning). All of these were tools which Jeremiah used to convey God's message to the people in that day.

The use of animals and nature is a teaching method that is even more evident when considering the style that Jeremiah used in regard to visual aids and parables in his book. Notice the different things God used through Jeremiah as visual aids:

- In Jeremiah 13 God asked Jeremiah to buy a **linen belt** and put it around his waist.
- In Jeremiah 19:1–2 and 11, God instructed Jeremiah:

*... “Go and buy a **clay jar** from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests and*

§Smith, James E., *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 44–46.

go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you . . . I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired”

Using the clay jar Jeremiah taught some of the elders and priests a lesson about the disasters to come.

- In Jeremiah 25 various representatives from the nations were coming into Jerusalem. While they were there, God sent Jeremiah into their midst. Using a **cup of wine**, he taught a message about God pouring His wrath out upon the nation.
- In Jeremiah 27 God asked Jeremiah to make a **yoke** out of scraps and crossbars and put it on his neck. Jeremiah wore the yoke as he preached a message from God which was related to the yoke he was wearing. He was mocked and some tried to intimidate him, yet his message from God was still delivered.
- In Jeremiah 32 God called upon Jeremiah to buy a **piece of property** just outside Jerusalem. At the precise time that God instructed him to buy this land, the Babylonian army was besieging the city of Jerusalem. It is foolish to buy land when a foreign army is trying to take control of that piece of property. At the time Jeremiah had been prophesying that God's people would one day come back to that territory to live again. Jeremiah was simply illustrating that he believed God's prophecies would come true to the people.
- In Jeremiah 35 God presented a graphic, visual demonstration on obedience using the Recabite family. Jeremiah was instructed to invite this **family** to one of the side rooms of the house of the LORD and to give them wine to drink.

Remember God was the One guiding the prophet Jeremiah. God instructed him to use each one of these visual aids to

convey His message to the people. What marvelous examples of transporting God's truth to the hearts and minds of the people.

Another channel message seen in the Book of Jeremiah is the **broad scope of time** involved. There are 812 verses in the book that are predictive. That is 60% of the book. However, there are 28 references back to the old covenant with quotes in part or relating to Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Jeremiah urged the people to go back and build their lives upon the foundation of the Law that God had given them. He urged them to seek and ask for, and then stand in the old paths (cf. Jeremiah 6). In Jeremiah 11 God renewed His covenant with the people of Judah and those who lived in Jerusalem. He reviewed the covenant He had given and urged them to keep it.

Jeremiah built his messages on the covenant and yet prophetically he looked into the future to build hope for a nation that was going into desolation and destruction. He was very conscientious and did point out the problems of the present, but the scope of his work dealt with the past and the future. For the Christian the scope of his work is much the same. It is important to have a good grasp of the covenant on which all Christians must stand — the covenant that Christ has given. It is important to have a good grasp of the events that are yet to come and of the promises that God has given to spur His children onward to remain faithful. Are Christians able to handle the deterioration of the world around them? Are they prepared to be in service to God in the future?

Jeremiah and Jesus in Parallel

Knowing that Jeremiah was a fabulous spokesman for God, it should be no surprise to learn that he is often compared to Jesus Christ. God saw fit to take Jeremiah down paths and circumstances that were parallel to Jesus later. Remember in Matthew 16:13 Jesus said:

“Who do people say the Son of Man is?” . . . [His disciples replied] “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Matthew 16:14).

Jeremiah has often been compared to Jesus. Note the following similarities between Jeremiah and Jesus:

- They were both aware of a God given mission as young men.
- They both had struggles with their own family members in the day in which they lived.
- They both faced trials without the joys and the encouragement of companionship. God told Jeremiah not to marry (cf. Jeremiah 16:1) and, of course, Jesus never married.
- There were similar national settings they both faced through the foreign powers under which they lived. They were both under the control of another nation and government most of their lives. Jesus was under Roman rule all of His life. Jeremiah was under Babylonian domination for most of his life.
- Both reacted against leaders and officials of their day. The very ones Jesus spoke out against, the Scribes and the Pharisees, should have been the ones to encourage Him. In Jeremiah’s day the false prophets and the priests were the thorns in his side and often the ones who instigated the actions against him.
- Both were burdened by the outlooks and attitudes of the people related to the Temple:

“Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive

words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless” (Jeremiah 7:2–8).

People around Jeremiah were putting emphasis on the place. Even Jesus’ apostles wanted Jesus to look carefully at the Temple. He had to tell them “. . . *not one stone here will be left on another . . .*” (Mark 13:2; Luke 21:6). Both saw people putting emphasis on **the place** more than the person, who should have been honored in that place.

- Both wept over the city of Jerusalem (cf. Jeremiah 4:19–22, 9:1). Later Jesus said, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem*” (Matthew 23:37–39). In Luke’s account, it is said, “*As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it* (Luke 19:41). It has been said that “Big men don’t cry,” but Jeremiah did and Jesus did. Are Christians’ hearts in this twenty-first century as attuned to the sin in the world? Do they cry over our cities and nations as Jeremiah and Jesus did?
- Maybe one reason Jeremiah and Jesus could cry was because they were both unique in their prayer life. That was what kept them in touch as they turned to God.
- They both had messages about the new covenant.
- Both struggled in the flesh with the trials that the people imposed upon them.
- Both were described as “*. . . a lamb that is brought to the slaughter*” (Isaiah 53:7; Jeremiah 11:19; Acts 8:2; 1 Peter 1:19; Revelation 5:12).

- Near the end both their lives seemed a failure, but after their deaths all mankind now looks back to see them both as heroes.

Prophets Contemporary with Jeremiah (627–586 B.C.)

Nahum (625–612 B.C.)

Daniel (605–536 B.C.)

Zephaniah (630–625 B.C.)

Ezekiel (593–570 B.C.)

Habakkuk (625–605 B.C.)

Jeremiah's Preaching and Rejection

Review and Introduction

The first chapter of this study of the Book of Jeremiah surveyed the when and where of Jeremiah's service. He came from the city of Anathoth and then also lived in Jerusalem for most of his prophetic life. The time frame for his service began during the time of King Josiah. The time line of Jeremiah's prophecy was during the reigns of the following kings:

- Beginning in the 13th year of **King Josiah** (627 B.C.).
- Josiah's son, **Jehoahaz**, who served only three months.
- Josiah's son, **Jehoiakim**, who served for 11 years.
- Son of Jehoiakim, **Jehoiachin**, who only served for three months.
- Ended with **Zedekiah** (586 B.C.).

Jeremiah served for a period of 40 years dealing with the downfall of Judah in its final stages before the nation went into Babylonian captivity.

Remember that this study will follow strands of thoughts or channels of truth that are scattered throughout the Book of Jeremiah because there are some mighty messages and some practical points that are too precious and too pertinent to overlook. It is important to remember the carnality of the times in which Jeremiah lived as well as the style and structure of the book. It will also be important to remember the twelve parallels between Jeremiah and Jesus and the similar circumstances and

responses in their lives. These parallels actually highlight the grandeur and greatness of the prophet Jeremiah.

The purpose of Jeremiah's preaching is clearly stated in Jeremiah 1:9–10:

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."

Places Where Jeremiah Preached

An important channel of truth seen throughout the Book of Jeremiah is the fact that Jeremiah's mission, which continued for approximately forty years, did not occur from a centralized pulpit in the court of the Temple yard. Jeremiah went into many different areas to serve. There are some great lessons to be learned by looking at the places where Jeremiah preached.

- Beginning in Jeremiah 7:2, notice that God asked Jeremiah to *"Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message . . ."* to the people. God also asked him to *"Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD"* (Jeremiah 26:2 19:14). These verses show that Jeremiah was called to the **Temple gate** and the **courtyard of the Temple** to speak to the people who would be assembled to worship in the area of the Temple. However, these were not the only places God asked him to preach.
- God also asked Jeremiah to:

"Go and stand at the gate of the people, through which the kings of Judah go in and out; stand also at all the other gates of Jerusalem. Say to them, 'Hear

the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem who come through these gates” (Jeremiah 17:19–20).

God wanted Jeremiah not only to speak to the kings of Judah who would use this gate, but he was also to speak to **all the inhabitants** of Jerusalem and Judah. His message was for all people.

- God also asked Jeremiah to:

“Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne — you, your officials and your people who come through these gates’” (Jeremiah 22:1, 37:17).

God was calling Jeremiah to unfold His messages in different locations and various settings. As I have covered this material in a number of settings, I have asked those in the audience to raise their hand if they have ever taken God’s truth **before a king** or a president, a prime minister, or even a governor. Up to this point in all the classes I have taught, no one has ever raised their hand. Thus the question is how many Christians have been doing what God wants His children to do? Consider the different areas where you have gone. Only a few have mentioned that they have talked to a senator or a representative. God calls His children to preach in many dimensions.

- Notice in Jeremiah 32:2 Jeremiah was “... *confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.*” In Jeremiah 33:1, he was still **in prison** and yet the word of the LORD came to him there and he delivered the LORD’s message even in prison.
- Perhaps more sobering would be when God called Jeremiah to:

“Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you” (Jeremiah 19:1–2).

The unique thing about Jeremiah being called to preach in *“the Valley of Ben Hinnom”* is that it would be comparable to a preacher today being asked to preach in the **city dump**. This was the place where the fires were continually burning. The Hebrew word for *Hinnom* is the same as the Greek word *Gehenna*. Those acquainted with this word are familiar with the fact that this is the word Jesus used eleven times to describe Hell. During the time of Jeremiah this was the place where the people sacrificed their children to the god Molech (cf. 2 Kings 23:10). This place called for Jeremiah to be in an area that was the most degenerated, degrading, disgusting, shameful, and the most **sickening social scene** of his day. Imagine being called to preach in such a place today. That is exactly where God sent His prophet. How many today Christians would even consider going to such a social scene in their own community to preach the word of God?

- The next place Jeremiah was called to preach adds another dimension to his trials. He was called to go into his **enemy's house** where he was beaten by angry men. He was imprisoned in the house of Jonathan and put in stocks in the dungeon (cf. Jeremiah 37:15f, 20:1–6). Consider again the kind of places Jeremiah was called to teach and preach.
- God also called Jeremiah to travel to Egypt and deliver His message in a **foreign land**. One point to consider in this area is the fact that God has always been interested in all nations. Many students of the Old Testament draw the conclusion that God's Law through Moses was only for Israel or the Hebrews. Looking throughout the Old

Testament, it is evident that God wanted His people to go to other people and nations with His message. Jonah is a good example of this since God sent him to the city of Nineveh. Jonah was called to preach to the people in that great city of Assyria (cf. Jonah 1:1). Amos was called to go to the neighbors of Israel. He spoke about the sins of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (cf. Amos 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1). The prophet Obadiah also spoke about Edom. The prophet Nahum also went to Nineveh in Assyria (cf. Nahum 1:1). Daniel spent a good part of his life dealing with government officials and leaders in the Babylonian and Medo-Persian Empires (cf. Daniel 1:1–7, 5:29–31, 6:1–3, 9:1). When Jesus came, He experienced the same kind of problem with people not seeing where things should be done. In John 4, Jesus traveled through Samaria and urged His disciples to see the harvest: “. . . *I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest*” (John 4:35). The Samaritans were a group of people whom the Apostles would not have normally approached with the Gospel.

- God also called upon Jeremiah to correspond with the **captives** who were living on foreign soil (cf. Jeremiah 29:1–13). Jeremiah wrote to the surviving elders among the exiles who had been carried away from Jerusalem into Babylon. Is it important to write letters to God's workers? Is it important to write about God's work in different places? If it was important enough for Jeremiah, it is important enough for Christians in the 21st century to consider. It is easy for preachers to get into a religious rut of going from their house to the church building, to the hospital, and back to their house. So much more needs to be done.

Even though by God's grace I have been able to prepare men to preach the Word on four continents, I am still chagrined and stunned by what happened in Nigeria. I was trying to help

build up the Body and get a congregation started in Okedia, but only six or eight had obeyed. About the time I was to return to the United States, Brother Waymon Swain came into the territory to work where I had been working. When I returned six months later to Nigeria, there was a congregation in Okedia of more than forty members, but they were all in prison. Brother Swain went into the prison that I had been driving by time and time again. That was the most fruitful area where we were working.

Christians need to be aware of how they are serving. Where are you serving? Where do you need to serve? There are numerous places where Christians can serve: pulpit work, radio and television work, home Bible studies, college campuses and schools where there are many foreigners who might be reached, prisons, jails, and halfway houses. There is friendship evangelism since everyone has friends who need to be reached. There is a need for effective teachers to work in local Bible class programs and door to door evangelism. There is a ministry among the elderly, the destitute, nursing homes, hospitals, and home bound patients. Bus ministries have been very effective in some areas. There are military bases in local areas and these people may be scattered all over the earth. Gospel meetings and campaigns are effective. Vacation Bible Schools may be an excellent outreach program. Congregations need deeper and special training for elders and seminars that reach a variety of people. Youth ministry is an area where some are called to serve. Others are effective in writing. Still others have job related outreach programs. Christian colleges, universities, and schools of preaching not only help develop effective teachers and preachers, but they also offer areas where work can be accomplished. Medical fields, domestic and international mission work of different types offer the advantage of travel to different parts of the world. This list offers many different areas of work for Christians. Another area which must never be overlooked is found within members of the Body, church

members who seem to be weak are still indispensable parts of the Body (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:22).

Brothers and Sisters, everyone is necessary! In 2 Timothy 2:24 Paul told Timothy, “*And the Lord’s servant must . . . [be] able to teach . . .*” Christians must be like Jeremiah and go wherever God sends. What a sobering thought!

Rejection by Those to Whom Jeremiah Preached

First of all, when someone thinks about ministry he thinks of a great response. When considering Jeremiah and his ministry there indeed was a great response, but the response was **rejection**.

- Jeremiah 1:1 notes that Jeremiah was from Anathoth. Jeremiah 11:21 records the response that Jeremiah received from the people of Anathoth: “. . . *‘Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD or you will die by our hands.’*” Jeremiah was rejected by **his neighbors**. They not only rejected him, but they actually sought to take his life.
- Jeremiah was also rejected by **his family**. God informed Jeremiah “*Your brothers, your own family — even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you . . .*” (Jeremiah 12:6). There have been workers in the Kingdom of God completely stopped by domestic turmoil. It does hurt when those in your own family turn against you or plot in conniving ways to undermine what you are trying to do.
- Jeremiah was also rejected by the **priests and prophets**: “*From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit*” (Jeremiah 6:13). Jeremiah 8:10–12 repeats this statement over again:

. . . From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the LORD.

Were they ashamed because of the abominations they had committed? They were not ashamed and did not even know how to blush. Can you imagine what it was like for Jeremiah to have to work with these individuals? Just imagine being at the downtown preachers' luncheon and knowing many were there with deceit in their hearts and false teachings on their lips. Imagine working with someone who would turn against you. Would you like to go on working among that kind of people? Remember that Jeremiah worked for forty years and served faithfully in that kind of environment.

- Not only was Jeremiah rejected by the priests and the prophets, but he was also rejected by his own **friends**. It was a joke to have friends who whispered about him the way they did, but Jeremiah called them "*friends*" in Jeremiah 20:10:

I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

It is interesting that the word "*friend*" is the Hebrew word **shalom**, which is an expression of greeting the Hebrew people often say to one another meaning, "Peace! Peace!" It also refers to a peace that is established by an association or friendship, thus meaning "*friend*" as it is translated in

this passage. The context of this passage shows that these individuals were conniving and plotting to hear Jeremiah say something that should not have been said, waiting for him to do something that should not have been done so that they could accuse him. They wanted to take his life. It hurts when a friend strikes against you. Such were the kind of people with whom Jeremiah had to work.

- Jeremiah 26:8 states:

*But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and **all the people** seized him and said, "You must die!"*

"*All the people*" wanted Jeremiah to die. He did not die that day, but he was faced with the horrifying reality of knowing that everyone wanted him dead. Yet he arose the next day and went out to speak for God and to serve Him. How does one man do that kind of work? Could not man walk in the same steps today and serve in a similar way?

- Jeremiah was also rejected by the **kings** under whom he served. After King Josiah, the next four kings not only did evil in God's sight, they gave no encouragement to God's prophets (cf. 2 Kings 23:31–37, 24:8–20). From Jehoahaz through Zedekiah there was a period of twenty-two years in which Jeremiah was faced with even the rulers responding against him. Second Chronicles 36 gives a summary of these four kings of Judah. Each one:

" . . . did evil in the sight of the LORD and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD " (2 Chronicles 36:12).

Jehoiakim not only wanted to kill Jeremiah, he also tore up the scroll that Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch and threw the pieces into the fire (cf. Jeremiah 36:1–32). King

Zedekiah seemingly understood that Jeremiah was a man of God and should have stood up for Jeremiah, but he was too weak. He turned Jeremiah over to the officials and they threw him into a cistern without water where Jeremiah sank down into the mud (cf. Jeremiah 38:1–6). The leaders of Judah were simply another part of Jeremiah's plague and problem as he proclaimed God's Word. It seems as if Jeremiah was rejected by everyone he knew, but he was never rejected by God.

How Jeremiah Was Rejected

Different ones imposed their skills and abilities in a negative direction against Jeremiah, a great man of God. Jeremiah's rejections actually become more traumatic and trying when one looks beyond who did it to how they did it.

- Jeremiah was rejected because the people **refused to hear and heed** what he said. When God told Jeremiah to proclaim this message, He warned Jeremiah:

“When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer. Therefore say to them, ‘This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips’”
(Jeremiah 7:27–28).

It is hard to teach a class and see people handing notes back and forth or talking to each other instead of listening. What does it do to a teacher when he sees someone looking out the window, daydreaming instead of paying attention to what is being said? Jeremiah was a man like any man. He had feelings like any man. Notice that in whatever response the people chose, Jeremiah did not react in kind.

- The people responded with ridicule, making Jeremiah a laughing stock (cf. Jeremiah 20:7, 28:5–11). In Jeremiah 18:18 the people said, “. . . *So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says.*” The word “**attack**” is from the Hebrew word *nakah*. The definition means to strike, smite, break into pieces, to kill, and to slay and is used to refer to hurting someone.
- The people not only ridiculed Jeremiah, but notice they also cast **negative reflections** on his life and character. They accused him of being a traitor to his country with words like, “*You are deserting to the Babylonians!*” (Jeremiah 37:13). In Jeremiah 43:2 the arrogant men accused Jeremiah of being a liar: “*You are lying! The LORD our God has not sent you . . .*”
- Not only did the people of Judah reflect negatively on Jeremiah's character, they also **physically abused** him. The priest Pashhur “. . . *had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple*” (Jeremiah 20:2). The officials also beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan (cf. Jeremiah 37:15). Jeremiah suffered persecution and trials from his own people in many various ways.
- Jeremiah was placed **in prison** after Pashhur had him beaten (cf. Jeremiah 37:15). Later he “. . . *was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained for a long time*” (Jeremiah 37:16). Even later after he had been placed in the cistern, he was pulled from the well, but he remained in the courtyard of the guard (cf. Jeremiah 38:13, 28).
- While Jeremiah was preaching to and praying for the people of Judah, they were **plotting his death**:

. . . “*Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more*” (Jeremiah 11:19).

At this time the LORD revealed the plot against Jeremiah and he referred to himself as “. . . *a gentle lamb led to the slaughter . . .*” After Jeremiah delivered his lesson in the court of the LORD's house, “. . . *the priests, the prophets and all the people . . . seized him and said, 'You must die!'*” (Jeremiah 26:8). The officials of the kingdom wanted to put Jeremiah to death. They accused him of discouraging the soldiers within the city and seeking the ruin of the people (cf. Jeremiah 38:4). Over and over again Jeremiah faced death at the hands of his kinsman. Imagine what that could do to a man. Have you ever had anyone threaten to kill you? Jeremiah lived with that kind of threat for weeks, months, and years laboring among these people.

Jeremiah is a fabulous example to Christians of an individual who was burdened and abused by his own brethren. Those who have faced unfair circumstances in family relationships, those who have reached out to minister only to be mistreated, and those who lovingly and longingly wanted to redeem the time only to end up reeling with remorse over the shameful, sickening way people have responded are fellow sufferers with Jeremiah. He never failed to stand up time and time again to speak for God. He was an amazing man and an amazing example for all Christians today.

Jeremiah's Response to Rejection

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at channel thoughts through the Book of Jeremiah, places where God sent Jeremiah, and then how some of the people reacted to his preaching. Basically, all the people rejected him including his neighbors, friends, family, priests and prophets, and the kings under whom he served. On more than one occasion, the scriptures state that all of the people cried out for this man to die. Each of these moments in Jeremiah's life had to bring haunting memories.

This chapter will look at how Jeremiah responded to the rejection and what it did to the man himself. Did he waver? He did and, in that wavering, there is a beautiful demonstration of how to go down into life's valleys without defeat. Jeremiah is an example of how individuals can handle their own weakness without abandoning their task. He showed how individuals can face the fickleness that is their human flesh and yet be able to still represent a mighty God in heaven while still on earth. The Book of Jeremiah enables man to see Jeremiah's solution even though he did not realize it himself for a long time. If one were able to talk to Jeremiah, he would probably see the same kind of feeling in Jeremiah's heart that is seen in the book Mighty Men of God by Clark W. Hunt. Hunt records the following response from John Henry Jallet to his friend Alice Slater. Jallet said:

I wish you wouldn't think I'm such a saint. You seem to imagine that I have no ups and downs but just a level and lofty stretch of spiritual attainment with unbroken joy and unanimity. By no means! I am often perfectly wretched and everything appears most murky; I often feel as though my religious life had only just begun and that I'm in the kindergarten stage.⁷

That describes Jeremiah. He has a message for all who would study this book and have had their own moments of stress, trials, and perhaps even the destruction of their faith. There is a message for all those who have looked at the ugly, unfair, and undesirable sides of life until they have wanted to cry out, "I can't take it any more." Such is the tone of this particular chapter. It is for all those who have been aggravated and agitated and attacked and felt alone until they wanted to run away from the situation. Jeremiah is the book for those who have lived through tests, trials, traumas, and even terrors to the point that they no longer want to declare the Truth.

All who have dealt with deceit and devilish decisions, diseased dispositions, denials, and denunciations until they are ready to abandon God Himself need to read and study the Book of Jeremiah. Those who have had such thoughts run through their minds so that they might not want to even express them to others will benefit from this chapter. All who have faced rejections without any explanation, refusals without reason, and rebuffs without remorse, the actions which have produced pain and pressure to the point that they did not think they could take anymore should tune into this particular chapter. This chapter is for any one who has gone before an audience wondering not so much about all the people, but wondering about only a few and what those tongues would say, wondering how those few

7 Hunt, Clark W., Mighty Men of God, Abbey Press, St. Meinrad, Indiana, 1959, p. 141.

would take what was said, knowing that those particular people were the critics. Sometimes preachers can hardly minister to all the others who were doing well for wondering about the few. If you have ever lived in that kind of situation, this chapter is for you.

The Prophet's Emotional Journey

“Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people. Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people. They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:1–3).

These verses and those that follow are often called “Jeremiah’s Confessions” probably because of the openness of the prophet in making known his troubled feelings before God. There is as deep a love as one would ever hope for one person to have for another as the prophet talked about weeping for his people in Jeremiah 9:1, but notice the stage of frustration seen in verse 2 and 3. Jeremiah talked about an assembly of treacherous men who would bend their tongues like bows to shoot out lies so that truth could not prevail in the land. Think about the environment of working with adulterers who proceed from evil to evil. Jeremiah was weeping in his love for a people from whom others would want to run away. Jeremiah knew the despondent, depressing facts of his situation. Jeremiah had received this information from the LORD, bringing about his feelings of despair. What an awful tragedy to not be able to trust your brothers or friends (cf. Jeremiah 9:4). How would any person work in a congregation with that environment? The

sadness of Jeremiah's situation is seen in the fact that he just wanted to run away and this was near the beginning of his trials.

Jeremiah did not run away, did he? What held him among these people when he was so down in his heart that he wanted to run? Finding the answer to this question might help others when they want to run but somehow know they need to stay. The answer may come from Clyde Francisco in his book Studies in Jeremiah.⁸ He asks questions from a different point of view:

What if it were God and He started running from His children? What would the condition be? Where could God go to create a new world while this one goes to ruin? Is there some remote corner of the universe where He could run?

There is no place God could run. Nor can a dedicated man afford to run away. Many a man leaves a difficult situation only to turn his back on greatness. There will be a heaven someday because God is willing to stick with some of His children! Francisco continues with the thought that the time for a minister to leave, if he has control over leaving, is when he has succeeded, not after he has failed. The emphasis here is "if" he is in control of the situation. If one is in a situation in which it is not only apparent that he has failed but will continue to do so while someone else could make a better contribution, the better decision would be to admit defeat and move onto a situation where he could profit from past mistakes. The important point here though is that Jeremiah did not leave. What enabled Jeremiah to stay? Knowing the answers to this question might be important for Christians today who need to stay in a trying situation and work through it.

⁸Francisco, Clyde T., Studies in Jeremiah, Convention Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1961, p. 71.

Jeremiah 11:18–23 is the account of God making known to Jeremiah the fact that his own people were going to threaten his life. This was a new dimension of the trials before him. Jeremiah said:

I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause (Jeremiah 11:19–20).

If all the people around you are adulterers, but they are not affecting your life that is different from when everyone around you wants to destroy you and even remove your name from the land of the living. At this point in Jeremiah's life things were a little more blinding and painful. Things progressed to the point that the enemy was on his doorstep and the attacks had begun. There really should be no chapter division between Jeremiah 11 and 12. At this point Jeremiah began offering his expressions of what he thought God ought to do. There are three different responses from Jeremiah in Jeremiah 12:1–4.

- Jeremiah complemented God and sought His help, trying to be positive and put his trust in God.
- Jeremiah questioned God: *"Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?"* He was actually asking whether God was aware or as awake as He needed to be.
- Jeremiah expressed self-pity trying to educate God by describing how these people were as if God did not already know. Jeremiah even reminded God of his own good attitude toward the people but wondered also how long it would be before God decided to punish them.

At this point, since the people were actually going after Jeremiah, he was ready for God to jump into action. Jeremiah's nerve sensors became a little more sensitive since he was being attacked personally. God answered Jeremiah with the following figures of speech:

If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? (Jeremiah 12:5).

God was basically telling Jeremiah that rather than sinking in his own self-pity, he should stand up and prepare for the more stressful tomorrows because there would soon be a war. Living in a land of peace would be desirable to having an army with their forces and horses marching through the land. God did not give Jeremiah much consolation for the situations about which he was complaining. God did equip him by telling him to get ready for the things to come.

Jeremiah's Deeper, Mounting Trials

Jeremiah's trials were just beginning and would get worse. He certainly was not through wavering and worrying. Notice his skepticism, wondering whether or not God was really tuned into his circumstances in Jeremiah 15:15–18:

You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering — do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty. I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. Why is

my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?

Jeremiah was hurting and wanted God's help. He was confused and, on one hand, reasoning things through, but with mixed emotions of remorse. There was desire coupled with doubt and commendation mingled with criticism. Jeremiah was a personality balancing on the edge of an emotional explosion. Jeremiah was close to a nervous breakdown. He begged God to remember him, yet he declared that he went to God for refreshment and God had deceived him and proved to be unreliable. He had feasted on God's words; they were his joy and heart's delight, yet he said they had filled him with indignation. He pleaded with God not to leave him, but accused God of being the reason he was all alone. He seemed to take pride in the fact that he was called by the name of God, yet because of God's assignment he had endured reproach for God's sake. Jeremiah's pain and his wounds had become perpetually incurable.

These verses present the fluctuations of a man who was going in several different directions illustrating that indeed there was a human side to this great prophet of God. Notice in these verses Jeremiah used the words "*me*," "*I*," and "*my*" sixteen different times. That was basically part of his problem. He had become so wrapped up in his own pain that he failed to see the greatness of God and failed to feel any kind of burden for the people of God. Jeremiah was very open concerning how he wanted God to react against the people. He was blunt and bold in telling God what he wanted God to do. God responded by saying:

. . . "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them" (Jeremiah 15:19).

Instead of heeding Jeremiah's directions God basically said, "Jeremiah shape up! If you do, I will let you keep speaking for Me." The word for "*repent*" in this verse is the Hebrew word *taashuwb*, which is sometimes translated "*return*." God was telling Jeremiah he had been accusing God like the people had accused him. He was listening and being affected more by the people of Judah than he was being affected by God. He needed to "*return/repent*" and listen to God rather than to the men around him. The same thing can happen to Christians today. People can control our lives so much that we lose our mission for God. Watch the prophet, Jeremiah. Listen to what God told him as God brought him out of the valley and continued to help him become a useful servant.

God continued by telling Jeremiah that if he would repent and return to Him that He would restore Jeremiah to serve Him and He would make Jeremiah ". . . *a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you . . .*" (Jeremiah 15:20). God was Jeremiah's sufficiency and security before the people. Look back to Jeremiah 1:17–19. God promised Jeremiah the very same things from the very beginning of his ministry. Jeremiah still did not grasp all that God could do for him. How many times has God seen His people, including Christians today, run in fear when in reality He was ready to build them up and give them a greater and more effective faith?

Jeremiah continued to face perils and to complain to God about what the people were doing, offering God counsel as to what He needed to do:

*They keep saying to me, "Where is the word of the LORD? Let it now **be fulfilled!**" [. . . "Let it **come** now." KJV] I have not run away from being your shepherd; you know I have not desired the day of despair. What passes my lips is open before you. Do not be a terror to me; you are my refuge in the day of disaster. Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep*

me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction (Jeremiah 17:15–18).

Notice the phrase “*Let it now **be fulfilled!***” or as it is in the King James Version “*Let it **come** now!*” The Hebrew word for “*come*” is **yaabow'**. Jeremiah had been pronouncing God's judgment upon this nation and foretelling the doom and desolation that were coming. The people threw his pronouncements of doom back into his face saying, “*Let it come now!*” Jeremiah had been proclaiming God's doom and desolation, but the people simply laughed at him. The same phrase is also used in Jeremiah 4:6, 5:15, 6:19, 11:8, 11, 13, and 15:8. The people of Judah continually mocked Jeremiah with these same words. Jeremiah was telling God he had tried to do the right thing. He begged God not to become a terror to him and to be his refuge in the day of disaster. He urged God to put his persecutors to shame and keep him safe. Jeremiah wanted God to punish the people for persecuting him. It is easy to see that Jeremiah was dwelling on the selfish outlook of what had been happening to him instead of ministering to the people in the way God had called for him to do. The same thing can happen to Christians today. They are not able to minister in the ways God calls for them to when they focus on their own trials in ministry.

In Jeremiah 18:18–23 notice that Jeremiah continued to respond to the people's reactions toward him:

They said, “Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says.” Listen to me, O LORD; hear what my accusers are saying! Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me. Remember that I stood before

you and spoke in their behalf to turn your wrath away from them. So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for my feet. But you know, O LORD, all their plots to kill me. Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

Jeremiah asked God to listen to him and to hear what his accusers were saying against him. Over and over again Jeremiah acted as if God did not know what was really happening. Jeremiah called upon God to deliver him and to punish the children of God by giving them over to famine and to the power of the sword. His motivation was because “. . . *they have dug a pit for me/to capture me*” (Jeremiah 18:20, 22). These were strong requests from Jeremiah. Do Christians today face the same kind of bad feeling concerning their brethren or someone in the community who has done them wrong? Can Christians today relate to Jeremiah's feelings and what really motivated him to ask for his enemies to receive such harsh punishment? Notice the openness and frank humanity of this man of God who was struggling with what was happening to him in his ministry. He was reacting to the struggles around him.

Even in Jeremiah's humanness, there are things for which he should be commended. First notice that in all the passages when he was reacting to what the people were doing to him, he always went to God with his feelings rather than making an attack upon the people himself. This is an important point to linger and focus on. No matter what retribution Jeremiah felt was just, he brought everything before God, counting on Him to pour out the punishment. Jeremiah put his concerns and

feelings into God's hands rather than trying to handle them on his own. Notice the following common sense responses of Jeremiah in turning everything over to God:

- God is wiser than any man. Men need to leave everything in His hands.
- God knows all things within and without. He never has to operate from partial facts in His scale of justice.
- God has greater love, grace, and mercy than man. He will be more long suffering than man could ever be.
- God knows the future. He knows whether His children, if given other opportunities, will repent.
- God is more powerful than man, enabling Him to punish better than man. If punishment is necessary, He can pour it forth with justice.

There are four questions that are scattered within this chapter that can act as a review for **Jeremiah's Response to Rejection**. These are also questions that are often asked by people who face their own valley of problems and circumstances. Reflect on the following questions:

- From Jeremiah 12:1 — *“Why has the way of the wicked prospered?”*
- From Jeremiah 15:18 — *“Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable?”*

These two questions reflect the self-pity of Jeremiah bursting forth. It is not proper that the way of the wicked should prosper, but Galatians 6:7–8 assures God's children:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction;

the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Psalm 73:1–28 also contains a lesson concerning the fact that people do not get away with their wickedness: *“Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart . . .”*

- From Jeremiah 15:18 — *“Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?”* This question reveals the thoughts of one who was doubting God. Even through his doubting, Jeremiah continued to carry on in his service to God.
- From Jeremiah 18:20 — *“Should good be repaid with evil?”* Of course, the answer to this question is, “No,” but sometimes that is exactly what seems to happen. Jeremiah 20 continues with the confessions from a prophet who was struggling and yet one who so openly showed his fickleness and pain. Victory was coming for him.

Jeremiah's Life Comes into Focus

Review and Introduction

The channel studies in the last chapter reviewed the confessions of Jeremiah. His confessions started when God first informed His prophet that the people of Anathoth were going to plot his death in Jeremiah 11 and continued through Jeremiah 20. In these chapters four factors unfold:

- Jeremiah clearly affirmed his personal weaknesses.
- In the midst of the unfairness, the abuse, and the wrong doing done to Jeremiah, even though a judgmental spirit brooded within, he took his concerns to God rather than making a verbal blast of his own upon the people in reaction to their wrong doing toward him.
- Even though on many occasions Jeremiah gave God various instructions on how and when to punish the people of God, he left punishment and justice in God's hands.
- There is a beautiful picture of a growing awareness to face reality, good or bad, with the realization that Jehovah God is mighty and He will prevail. This picture comes after another of Jeremiah's strong condemnations of the nation in Jeremiah 19.

Jeremiah's Battle With Discouragement

Jeremiah 20 begins with "*Pashhur. . . the chief officer in the temple of the LORD*" having Jeremiah beaten and put in the stocks for a day and a night. After he was released, Jeremiah

gave a verbal blast from Jehovah to inform Pashhur that he was going to see the officials around him die before his very eyes. Jeremiah told him that he and all of Judah would be taken into exile. Pashhur was going to watch all his friends die by the sword before he died and was buried in Babylon for all the false prophecies he had made. Imagine dying that way.

After this declaration it seems that Jeremiah finally realized what God had promised him earlier concerning the fact that He would make His prophet a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and like walls of bronze before the whole land (cf. Jeremiah 1:17–19). Some commentators believe Jeremiah 20:7–10 is more complaining from Jeremiah, but I disagree. Jeremiah was finally able to identify what had been going on in his mind:

*O LORD, you deceived me, and I was **deceived**; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him" (Jeremiah 20:7–10).*

The Hebrew used for "deceived" is the word *waa'epaat*, which would be better translated as God's ingeniousness or persuasiveness. God prevailed upon Jeremiah in such a way to lead him along so that he would be prepared for every occasion in which God wanted him to speak. Jeremiah allowed himself to be persuaded; he was finally able to identify what had been going on in his mind. His friends had been mocking him all day long so that he had become a laughing stock before them. When

someone laughs at another person two or three times as he presents a lesson, that bothers a teacher. Jeremiah faced laughter and ridicule day after day before a mass of people who mocked and ridiculed him for everything he did. He also had to face the kind of message he was delivering. They were basically negative: *"I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction"* (cf. Jeremiah 20:8). This went on day after day, week after week, and even year after year. He had to face the meanness of people who brought him insults and reproaches all day long because he was delivering the Word of the LORD. Jeremiah did not face this kind of derision for an hour or two; he faced it day after day. That caused the mind set of not wanting to mention God's name or speak any more for Him. Those first verses of Jeremiah 20:7–9a do indeed sound like more complaints from Jeremiah, but he was simply conveying what had been going on. And at this point in his life he made this fabulous discovery:

"His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9b).

What a marvelous moment in Jeremiah's life. He finally realized he **had** to speak. He knew it was not his attitude that caused this passion because he had been ready to quit. He had decided not to speak any more, but then he realized the burning fire in his bones was God's goodness working in him and through him to fulfill whatever God wanted him to say and do. Jeremiah experienced that fabulous moment when he discovered God had taken him beyond himself. Do you believe that He can do that for you? God wants to work in all His children in these marvelous ways.

Finally Jeremiah had a clear understanding of God's work within his life. He realized and finally understood that even though there were people whispering on every side and behind his back (*"Terror on every side!"*) the LORD was with him like a mighty warrior. All of the ridicule and mocking were still

going on, but the prophet Jeremiah had changed! At this point, he did not complain or murmur any more. He said:

*But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten. [And it still has not been forgotten to this day.] O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. **Sing to the LORD!** Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked (Jeremiah 20:11–13).*

From this point forward Jeremiah was ready! This is sometimes called Jeremiah's Garden of Gethsemane. Jeremiah was "the needy one" God rescued from the hands of the wicked ones. Just as Jesus prayed and then was able to prevail through all the trials and the spitings and finally the crucifixion itself, Jeremiah faced other difficult circumstances, but never murmured or complained after this point.

This is a fabulous lesson for all Christians to learn. The hand of a mighty God works within us. All men need to realize the same fact that Jeremiah finally realized. With the same kind of spirit the Hebrew author wrote about, Jeremiah was able to rally forward:

So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"
(Hebrews 13:6).

I want to bring this back to a brief illustration of something that happened at the Sunset School of Preaching when a graduate came back in the 1980's. We greeted each other and I asked him how the work was going. He recounted how thirteen had been baptized in the two previous weeks as well as fourteen

others restored. It was not during a campaign or a special effort, but just the fruit of personal contacts and studies with many in the community where he lived. The interesting thing was that five hours later, I talked to that same student, who had a little bit of a problem with mood swings, and he stated to me the negative side of his ministry: the indifference that he found especially among the leaders. There was a lack of vision and the unwillingness of anyone to start a good work. If a good work was started, he stated that he had to do it. If any good was accomplished, he said he had to push it. He was so disappointed with how they acted that he was ready to go to another congregation. In fact, he did not even know whether or not he wanted to keep preaching. He was the same preacher who five hours earlier had responded with the glowing report of twenty-seven responses in two weeks. Jeremiah probably did not have that many responses in twenty years. This just illustrates the fickleness that can be seen in some hearts.

Five Applications for God's Spokesman

Every Christian who speaks for God is going to face fear in some form. He will have a choice on how to face it. He can let it conquer him or, by God's grace, he can conquer it. Christians need to remember 2 Timothy 1:7: *"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity [“fear” KJV], but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.”*

Every spokesman for God is going to be intimidated by someone somewhere along the way. He can become ineffective or he can become effective by God's grace. Remember Paul told the Corinthians: *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"* (2 Corinthians 9:8).

Every Christian is at one time going to face the fear of the unknown. He can run from it or he can trust God to walk him through it. Peter said in 1 Peter 5:5–7:

... all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

It is easier to believe as a Christian after enduring your own valley and having faced unknown situations successfully.

Every spokesman for God will at some point in time consider himself inadequate for some of God's assignments. He has a choice. He can convince himself that he is inadequate, remain detached, and not do it. Or he can do like Paul urged the Corinthians to do:

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant – not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Corinthians 3:4–6).

He can mature and grow to become what God knows he can be. Christians are not sufficient on their own. God is their sufficiency.

All Christians are going to face pressure from little faith. We all have a choice. Give in and give up or we can dig in and develop. Get up, grow faith, and go forward. Remember the father who brought his son to Jesus and asked:

*... "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; **help me overcome my unbelief!**" (Mark 9:22–24).*

Christians in every century have had to travel the same road Jeremiah traveled. We may not all go into as deep a depression or face as many trials as he did, but we all need to be determined that we will not come over to the world knowing we must overcome it. Jeremiah 11–20 is a fabulous grouping of thoughts as Jeremiah identified his personal perils and problems, his weaknesses and his worry, his trials and his tears. In the midst of it all, Jeremiah worked his way through by God's grace so that he grew and continued because he had faith and fidelity in the Father in heaven. There is a steadfastness and stamina in Jeremiah that ought to forever stand as a standard for every Christian.

Jeremiah's Concept of God

Jeremiah was able to do some amazing things in his life. How did he really do it all? One answer to that question involves another channel study, Jeremiah's concept of God. Jeremiah had to know certain things about God for him to be able to do all that he did. The Book of Jeremiah has this information for Christians in every age.

Jeremiah knew that **God is Sovereign**. He rules heaven and earth. Notice Jeremiah 10:12–13:

But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

There is nothing phenomenal in these verses for most people. The point many people do not realize in the elements and circumstances all around them is that God is truly the One ruling to supply the air they need to breathe, the gravity that holds them on the earth, the movement of the earth around the

sun to give them days and nights. If God can do all that, then would He not truly take care of all His children in every age? Knowing these facts would give Jeremiah the confidence he needed to do all he had to do.

Jeremiah knew that **God controls all things** in accordance with His will. Jeremiah 25:15–28 is a good place to pick up two or three thoughts concerning this knowledge. Notice Jeremiah's response against the nations:

This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them." So I took the cup from the LORD's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it: Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today; Pharaoh king of Egypt . . . all the kingdoms on the face of the earth . . . "Then tell them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.' But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: "You must drink it!"'"

Remember God is truly over the nations. The prophet Daniel praised God in the following ways:

. . . "Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his. He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him. I thank and

praise you, O God of my fathers: You have given me wisdom and power, you have made known to me what we asked of you, you have made known to us the dream of the king” (Daniel 2:20–23).

Hosea 8:4 points out God’s statement: “*They have set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval . . .*” Men cannot blame God for Hitler or Stalin and all the massacres men have exacted because there are different stages to God’s will:

- There is His **ideal** will. If man had followed that from the garden of Eden, then there would never have been a need for Calvary.
- There is God’s **allowed** will. It is in this area that man has gone his own way and has brought all kinds of chaos, conflict, and corruption to this earth. Sin runs rampant and God did not author sin.
- There is God’s **ultimate** will, which is given in Romans 14:10–12:

For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

It is in this framework that God controls all things in accordance with His will. Notice after Jeremiah’s prophesy against the nations in Jeremiah 25:15–28, he added the following in Jeremiah 25:29:

“‘See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a

sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the LORD Almighty.”

Thus Jeremiah, writing and meditating on that, could certainly conclude that God would take care of him during his trials.

Jeremiah knew that **God is omnipresent** as is evident by some of the teachings in Jeremiah 23:23–24. He raised the following questions speaking for God:

- *“Am I only a God nearby . . . and not a God far away?”*
- *“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?”*
- *“Do not I fill heaven and earth?”*

Jeremiah knew God is a God who is near and also far away. He knew no one can hide from God. He knew God totally fills the heavens and the earth. In writing messages like these, Jeremiah would have realized that wherever he went God would know about it, God would know what to do, and God would surely be there.

Jeremiah also knew that **God is omniscient**. Knowing that God had made all things would also mean God knows all. He knows everything even down to the level of the heart. Jeremiah knew that God is the One who tries the feelings of the heart and mind:

“But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause” (Jeremiah 11:20).

“I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:10).

O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind . . . (Jeremiah 20:12).

Yet you know me, O LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you (Jeremiah 12:3).

Knowing God and knowing that God was aware of him and his needs enabled Jeremiah to be the kind of person he was.

Notice that **God is the One** who deals with individuals. He is the One who was aware of the Ethiopian slave, Ebed-Melech, even though He is in charge of the universe. God instructed Jeremiah to “*Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel says . . .’*” (Jeremiah 39:16). God cares for everyone. Jesus died for all (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10–15). The same message is given over and over again throughout the Book of Jeremiah. Notice Jeremiah 45:1–5, a very short chapter within the book and all devoted with a message to Baruch. God is conscious of individuals. Jeremiah knew that and knew that God would also be conscious of him. This kind of knowledge of God gave Jeremiah the courage he needed.

This last point may be the most vital of all — **God loves His people, but He demands obedience and allegiance**. This truth is woven throughout the Book of Jeremiah. Notice for example in Jeremiah 2:3 that the people of Israel were “*. . . holy to the LORD, the **first fruits** of his harvest.*” Notice the different phrases used to describe God’s people and how He loves them:

- “*I had planted you like a **choice vine** of sound and reliable stock . . .*” (Jeremiah 2:21).
- “***my beloved***” — the beloved of Jehovah God (Jeremiah 11:15).
- “***my inheritance . . . the one I love . . . my vineyard . . . my field . . . my pleasant field***” (Jeremiah 12:7–12).
- “***the LORD’s flock***” (Jeremiah 13:17).

- *“I have loved you with an **everlasting love**; I have drawn you with loving-kindness”* (Jeremiah 31:3). Jeremiah 31 is a fabulous chapter in regard to Jeremiah's description of the great nature of God's love.

Even though God loves His children and has these feelings for them, He has always made it evident that if they wanted to stay in Judah as a nation, the only way they could do it would be to amend their ways and deeds. In Jeremiah 7:15 He said, *“I will thrust you from my presence . . .”* God demands allegiance and obedience.

God's Call for Judah to Repent

The fact that God demands allegiance and obedience leads into another channel study that can be seen throughout the Book of Jeremiah. God not only worked with His children to demonstrate His love, but also to try to make them conform to what He knew they needed to do and to be. This was another reason God sent Jeremiah on His mission, to call Judah to repentance.

There is something significant in the fact that God called over and over again. The following points and lessons are all found within the Book of Jeremiah, but each one can be seen from the Garden of Eden down to this present hour. God is still waiting for people to come to Him. There are five lessons to be learned from God repeatedly calling the people to come back to Him:

- **God is truly patient.**
- **Man can be truly stubborn.** When man does not respond favorably to any of the ways that God is using to call them to repentance, there is evidence of the intensity of man's stubbornness. All of the reasoning and willingness of God to give good, clear directions are tossed aside.

- **Sin's influence** within people can be very strong. Wrong has the power to overcome love and patience and mercy and common sense. People still rebel and will not do what God wants. That is sin's influence.
- Truly **man is precious in God's sight**. This fact has been true from the very beginning. It has been the same from the Garden of Eden to this present age. In between there is a grand scheme of redemption plus each of the ten ways God tried to bring Judah to repentance. God used the cross, sacrificing His own Self. He identified His love for His children while they were yet sinners (cf. Romans 5:6–8). All men are precious in His sight.
- **Man is truly redeemable**. Throughout history, there have been times when men have wanted to quit, but God has always known better. The Book of Jeremiah has many verses about someone who wanted to give up:
 - ▶ “. . . ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them’” (Jeremiah 2:25).
 - ▶ “. . . ‘It’s no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart’” (Jeremiah 18:12).

Notice in Jeremiah 29:12–13 that God knew there would be a day when there would be some who would seek Him and search for Him with all their hearts:

“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the LORD . . . (Jeremiah 29:12–13).

- **Every man is redeemable.** YOU are redeemable! Christ died for all. Keep this point in mind when considering the ways God tried to bring Judah to repentance:
 - ▶ God warned Judah with the fall of Israel (cf. 2 Kings 17). In approximately 721 B.C. the tribes of Israel in the North were carried into Assyrian captivity. The land to the North was basically desolate and had been deteriorating for years. Judah could look over the border and see the desolation. Therefore they should have known by what had happened to Israel that desolation would come to them because they had been doing the same things. They needed to repent.
 - ▶ God pointed to the nations with heathen gods telling Judah that these nations showed their gods more respect than Judah gave to Him. Notice what God told Jeremiah to proclaim in Jeremiah 2:10–13:

“Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this: Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,” declares the LORD. “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”

God wanted Judah to honor and respect Him. Jehovah God is not a “worthless idol,” He is the one true God. Judah did not respond to God for all His gracious goodness. Rationally His goodness should have been enough to cause them to turn to God, but they did not.

- ▶ God brought famine to call Judah to repentance. It was a punishment God brought about so that they would confess their sins, but they did not correct their lives. There are examples of Judah confessing with their lips, but not in their lives. They faltered and failed again.
- ▶ God asked for at least one man who would seek truth and execute judgment: *“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem . . . If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks truth, I will forgive this city”* (Jeremiah 5:1). They did not respond favorably to God, so no one was found. Jeremiah discovered *“The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly unfaithful . . .”* (Jeremiah 5:11).
- ▶ God pleaded with Judah to turn from idolatry, which was the real core problem for Judah. God pleaded with them in Jeremiah 7–10 as well as other places throughout the Book of Jeremiah. God did His utmost to get them to turn back to Him. Idolatry does not hurt God, but it hurt Judah. It did not shame God, but it shamed Judah. He was trying to reason with them. All the devotion Judah gave to their *“worthless idols”* was no more than what God asked for them to give to Him. They still would not obey.
- ▶ God warned Judah that they would be like Shiloh and Ephraim, a place of infamy to them (cf. Jeremiah 7:14–15; Psalm 78:55–72).
- ▶ God renewed the covenant promise with Judah (cf. Jeremiah 11:1–11) and they made a commitment to it by standing while it was read, but they did not keep their commitment by standing up for the covenant. They did not repent before God.
- ▶ God offered to spare Judah if they would keep one commandment (cf. Jeremiah 17:19–27). He asked them to keep the Sabbath, but they did not. They did not repent.

- ▶ God brought war to the people of Judah. God was truly justified because all of His patient effort and reaching out were only rewarded by rebellion and ruin. How sad!

If you are on the wrong course, be sure to look toward Jehovah and do not delay too long:

If they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace (Hebrews 6:6).

A Nation's Relationship and Responsibility Toward God

Introduction

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars (2 Chronicles 16:9, KJV).

For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war (2 Chronicles 16:9, NIV).

What a wonderful thought: God's eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth" in order to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His. This does not only apply to individuals who are committed to God, it also applies to nations. This is shown in the Book of Jeremiah when studying the ways God dealt with Jeremiah and all that the prophet himself went through. Consider his personality and character study as well as the mission which God sent him on: "See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). God specifically sent Jeremiah as a prophet to the "nations and kingdoms." God was the One who was going to judge these people, but Jeremiah carried God's message for Him.

It is no surprise that the channel studies seen throughout the Book of Jeremiah contain national bits of information that need to be examined to gain a complete picture of all that the book reveals.

Ways a Nations Falls Away From God

Judah is a classic example of the price that must be paid when a country turns away from its Creator. There are numerous examples of how a nation can fall away from God. Note also the positive side of how a nation can turn toward God. Consider along the way how things are in the nation where you live. Examine the trends or patterns which are characteristic of the life styles around you. Each of these characteristics seems to lead a nation into the next trend. Are any of the following prevalent in the nation where you live?

- A nation falls away from God when the **leaders become corrupt**. Note the account of Manasseh, who set into motion the final stages for the downfall of Judah as he filled the nation of Judah with the innocent blood of his own son. He set a standard in sin that was declared to be worse than the nations around Judah (cf. 2 Kings 21:1–18). Look at King Jehoiakim as the one who set a standard in selfishness, oppression, dishonest gain, and shedding innocent blood (cf. 2 Kings 23:36–24:7; Jeremiah 22:11–18). These characteristics and this kind of conduct point to a nation that was pursuing a course downward and away from God, His Word, and His will. People do not rise above their leaders, but they will sink into the cesspool of carnality when rogue rulers reign. That is what happened in Judah.
- A nation falls away from God when **they listen to men** rather than to God:

“A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?” (Jeremiah 5:30–31).

There was corruption throughout all the different leaderships in Judah. Jeremiah 23:9–15 talks about the prophets and priests as a part of the corruption within the land:

“And among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen something horrible: They commit adultery and live a lie. They strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. They are like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah” (Jeremiah 23:14).

Consequently, in listening to men rather than to God, the people of Judah were carrying out a dual process of departure. First they were listening to men who did not know how to direct their own steps (cf. Jeremiah 10:23). In the process they were walking away from God instead of following in His steps (cf. 1 Peter 2:21–24). They did not have the footprints of Jesus to follow like men today, but they did have a prophet who was declaring:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’ And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you’” (Jeremiah 23:16–17).

Jeremiah 7:24 says Judah did not listen or pay attention to what God had to say: “. . . *they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.*” They listened to men rather than God.

- A nation falls away from God when they **assume they are obeying God**, but in reality they are not:

. . . “*Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah . . . if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, ‘We are safe’ — safe to do all these detestable things?*” (Jeremiah 7:2, 6–10).

God was reasoning with Judah, trying to help them see what was happening. They assumed they were obeying God because they were still going to the temple of the LORD. They were responding to Baal, to men, and to other patterns of life that would further pollute them rather than responding to God.

- A nation falls away from God when they **turn to idolatry**. Judah refused to hear the words God spoke to Jeremiah:

Then the LORD said to me, “There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem. They have returned to the sins of their

forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers. Therefore this is what the LORD says: 'I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them. The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes. You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem'' (Jeremiah 11:9–13).

The nation of Judah repeatedly turned to raw and rank idolatry. Psalm 115 describes the futility of idols: *“Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them”* (Psalm 115:8).

- A nation falls away from God when they turn to idolatry and **lose the ability to discern between good and evil:**

“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good” (Jeremiah 4:22).

This verse in Jeremiah is comparable to Hebrews 5:11–14:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Christians can discern good and evil when they exercise the principles that God has given. The people of Judah had lost that ability and were thus given over to evil.

- A nation falls away from God when **immoral practices become their lifestyle**. God's message in Jeremiah 5:7–8 says:

“Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife.”

As an outgrowth of these immoral practices, the flesh began to dominate lives in Judah. Selfishness as it related to fleshly relationships took over.

- A nation falls away from God when **respect for human life deteriorates**. There are various stages of this evident throughout the Book of Jeremiah. The nation of Judah shed the innocent blood of good prophets and the poor (cf. Jeremiah 2:30–34). They oppressed the aliens, the orphans, widows, and those who were innocent (cf. Jeremiah 7:6; 9:8). They even sacrificed their own sons and daughters to the god Molech (cf. Jeremiah 7:31; 19:4–5; 32:34–35). Thus in that abominable state, the value of life, even in their own families, lost any meaning to them.

Many people in the twenty-first century may cringe thinking about a nation who would go that far with such abominable sacrifices, but most need to stop and consider

the value of life in their own time. People in the United States ought to stop and look at their practices regarding the value of life through the practice of abortion. It is very obvious that God considers that which is in the womb as life. Note the following verses:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be (Psalm 139:13–16).

Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her . . . When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb (Genesis 25:21–22, 24).

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit . . . "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1:41, 44).

Christians should be sobered by the statements made by Paul B. Fowler in his book Abortion: Toward an Evangelical Consensus.⁹ He states that one in every four

⁹ Fowler, Paul B., Abortion: Toward an Evangelical Consensus, Multnomah Books, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1984. p.11.

pregnancies in the United States today ends in abortion. Approximately two million abortions are performed annually in the United States and the worldwide figures soar from fifty to seventy-five million. Misery loves company and there is plenty of company in regard to the cheap, deteriorating outlook toward life in the world today. Consider Jeremiah 19:4–8:

*“For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal — something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter. In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. **I will make them fall by the sword** before their enemies, at the hands of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives.”*

Notice that God charged Judah with the abomination of offering up their sons and daughters. Then notice His punishment plan for them:

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“I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies . . . I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh . . .” (Jeremiah 19:7).

Perhaps Christians need to ask themselves if God is nearing that same punishment plan for the nations in the twenty-first century who have that same kind of appalling practices, nations who have lost their appreciation for life itself.

- A nation falls away from God when **materialism becomes a goal and guide**. God pointed to this problem when He said:

*“Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become **rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek**. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?” declares the LORD. “Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?”* (Jeremiah 5:26–28).

God's people had become wicked men lying in wait so they could become rich. Any time materialism becomes a goal and guide for men it shapes the values of a nation so that the lack of value causes that nation to lose honesty, integrity, mercy, truth, and any appreciation for common sense and rational thinking. Everything will be lost when materialism takes over.

- A nation falls away from God when they **rely on other nations** rather than on God. Man always seeks security.

When Judah turned away from God as their security, they began to form alliances with other nations. God said:

“Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the LORD your God when he led you in the way? Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?” (Jeremiah 2:17–18).

Judah was trading the security they had with Jehovah God, ruler of heaven and earth, by surrendering the values God had given them so they could form alliances with nations like Egypt and Assyria.

- A nation falls away from God when **they become stubborn, refusing the truth** when it is offered. That certainly happened to Judah:

“But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away. They do not say to themselves, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.’ Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good” (Jeremiah 5:23–25).

... *“When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their*

migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD” (Jeremiah 8:4–7).

God was trying to call Judah back to Him, but they were too stubborn to listen or pay attention. They stubbornly resisted what God wanted them to do. It is interesting to note that in the Book of Ecclesiastes there are several Hebrew words that are actually translated into English as the word “fool.” One of those Hebrew words is the word *sakhal*, which can also be translated “stubborn.” It was in this manner that their stubbornness led Judah to become foolish. Remember also that they could no longer reason between good and evil and little by little they lost any consciousness of a value system.

“Anyone can make a mistake, but a fool insists on repeating it.”¹⁰ How many times have people been fools through stubbornness? Another quote comes from Inspiring Quotations: “Some men die by shrapnel and some go down in flames, but most men perish inch by inch who play at little games.”¹¹ Stubbornness is just a consistent apostasy from the Almighty, a consistent, foolish course pursued.

- A nation falls away from God when they **begin to operate by their own imaginations**. Notice the deteriorating stages that are involved here. God made the following statement in Jeremiah 23:16–17:

. . . “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They keep saying to those who despise me, ‘The LORD says: You will have peace.’”

¹⁰ Man, Robert, DeFord, Deborah, (Project Editor) Quotable Quotes, Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, New York, 1997. p. 84.

¹¹ Wells, Albert M. Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelsons Publishers, Nashville, TN. p. 73.

*And to all who follow the stubbornness [“**imagination** of his own heart,” KJV] of their hearts they say, ‘No harm will come to you.’”*

When men turn away from God's revelation in order to operate by their “*imaginations*,” they are headed for devastation. God reveals four things about the downward trend of Judah in this passage:

- ▶ People come to despise God. They really do not want what God says. They would rather do what they want.
- ▶ People begin to walk in the stubbornness of their own hearts.
- ▶ Prophets pacified the people with a vision of their own imagination, thinking that was all right.
- ▶ People were led into futility. The word futility really means nothingness. Jesus told His disciples: “. . . *apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). That is what happened to a whole generation of people in Judah.

America is losing her homes, losing them to desertion, divorce, dissipation, and delinquency. Americans have grown weak at the center. The home ground has sunk under an avalanche of “Things,” which is really materialism. We have lost our directions, our values, and our priorities. Career mothers, haggard fathers, and farmed-out children have made for haunted houses. The inflation of our money and the acceleration of our desires have put home life on the back burner. Family living at the flesh level has left us godless, fruitless, and hapless. Perhaps there is more to it than that, but think of the nation where you live and serve. Can you say the nation you are living in has not taken any of these steps walking away from God? Review the steps. It is a sobering thing. Lt. George W.W. Quinn sent in a letter from an unknown writer to Ann Landers in the Daily Oklahoman on August 21, 1998. The

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writer listed the general trend of a nation in eight stages as it goes the full cycle, upward and downward. Take note of these stages:

- From **bondage** to spiritual faith. That is moving in a good direction.
- From spiritual faith to great courage, another good direction.
- From great courage to liberty. That is what all men want, to be free.
- From liberty to abundance. Has America been there?
- From abundance to selfishness.
- From selfishness to complacency.
- From complacency to dependency.
- From dependency back into **bondage** again.

What a cycle! And what a sadness!

How a Nation Turns Toward God

There are some very significant points to consider concerning how a nation can turn toward God. It is important that Christians choose these as the way they want to go:

- A nation needs to **fear and reverence God**. God regretted Judah's course of action:

"They do not say to themselves, 'Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest'" (Jeremiah 5:24).

God blesses His children through His care. Judah should have feared and revered Him, but they did not. They did not recognize God as the giver of every good and perfect

gift (cf. James 1:17). There needs to be respect given to the great Giver, who gives what we do need.

- A nation needs to **know and understand God** and His ways:

“but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:24).

Kyle M. Yates made the following statement in his book, Preaching From The Prophets:

. . . the people of any nation must know and understand and lean on the eternal God in such a way that they may be sure of the boundless reservoir of strength for each emergency. Wisdom, might, and riches will all be useful as they are put at man's disposal by God. Righteousness, justice, and loving kindness will be woven into the fabric of the national structure. God working through human hearts will work wonders on earth.¹²

Christians in all ages need to respect and respond to who God is.

- A nation needs to **seek and search for God** with its whole heart. God identified what He had in mind for His people:

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans

to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:11–13).

That was God's divine plan. First Chronicles 28:9 adds:

“... acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.”

- A nation (and individuals also) needs to **obey God's voice**. It is not enough just to seek Him. There comes a time when obedience must follow:

“but I gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you” (Jeremiah 7:23).

The key is to have the spirit disposition of obedience both as individuals and as a nation.

Why God Has Blessed America

It matters not what others do
For God has left a standard true.
I'll search its pages day by day
And pray for courage to obey.¹³

- Within a nation there must be **respect for others**. Our relationship is not just perpendicular with God. It is also

¹³ Toole, Pulpit Helps: Sohadioutis, Spiro (editor) April 1983 Edition, p. 25.

horizontal with other people. God wants His children to relate properly and take an interest in one another:

“If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever” (Jeremiah 7:5–7).

- Nations and individuals need to **trust in the future**:

“They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul” (Jeremiah 32:38–41).

This was God's divine plan. Christians today need to respond to God as He says:

... *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. **I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt...**”* (Jeremiah 31:3–4).

God's way of building a nation involves His children responding to His ever lasting love, His loving-kindness, and **His rebuilding process**.

Jeremiah's Call and Commission

Introduction

Jeremiah 1:1–19

Thus far this book has covered various aspects of studies within the Book of Jeremiah looking primarily at the channel studies covered in the book. Remember where the prophet Jeremiah preached, how he was rejected, who rejected him, what this did to him personally, and the growth process that he experienced through God's providential care. Chapter Four of this study looked at how Jeremiah's life came into focus and his concept of God. It also looked at the ways God tried to call the nation of Judah to repentance. Chapter Five looked at the ways a nation falls from God and how a nation then can turn to God. Each one of these is a vital lesson in the Book of Jeremiah, but there are also special events and particular lessons that can be very practical by looking at the book as it unfolds chapter by chapter.

G. Campbell Morgan in his book Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah quotes Dr. Moorehead portraying the pain-ridden period in which Jeremiah prophesied:

It was Jeremiah's lot to prophesy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe; when political excitement was at its height; when the worst passions swayed the various parties, and the most fatal counsels prevailed.

It was his to stand in the way over which his nation was rushing headlong to destruction; to make a heroic effort to arrest it, and to turn it back; and to fail, and to be compelled to step to one side and see his own people, whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman, plunges over the precipice into the wide, weltering ruin.¹⁴

The Path That Led to Destruction

The quotation from Morgan in a very effective way describes the time in which Jeremiah was living and had to serve. One other description of Jeremiah's day can be seen in 2 Kings 22 and even carried over to parallel the days in the twenty-first century. These descriptions may be a more painful look at Christendom than some want to see.

In the 2 Kings 22 in the eighteenth year of the good King Josiah (about 622 B.C.) certain things unfolded. The setting begins when King Josiah sent Shaphan, the secretary, to the temple of the LORD to Hilkiah, the high priest. Shaphan and Hilkiah had been instructed by the King to pay the workers who were busy repairing the temple of the LORD. Notice what transpired between these two men:

Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the Lord." He gave it to Shaphan, who read it (2 Kings 22:8).

Notice that when Shaphan read the Book of the Law it did not affect him. He just went on about his duties delivering the money to the workers without any reaction at all. When

¹⁴ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1969. p. 10.

Shaphan went to report to the King that the officials had paid the workers and supervisors of the temple, he informed the King about the book that Hilkiah had given him. When Shaphan read the “*Book of the Law*” in the presence of the young King, Josiah’s reaction to the reading was completely different Shaphan’s. King Josiah’s reaction was also very different from the reaction most Christians today have when they look into the Book:

*When the king heard the words of **the Book of the Law**, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king’s attendant: “Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there **concerning us.**” (2 Kings 22:11–13).*

Josiah’s first response when he heard The Law read was to tear his robes. This was Josiah’s way of showing grave concern about what he heard. He **immediately** commanded key people to go and pray to the LORD not only for the himself, but also for the people and all Judah. The key phrase to explain King Josiah’s reactions to the reading of the Law can be seen in “*Great is the LORD’s anger that burns against us . . . all that is written there concerning us.*” Josiah realized that these words applied to the nation of Judah.

The key people Josiah ordered to “*go and inquire of the LORD,*” went to the Huldah the prophetess. In that day when the people wanted a message from God, they went to this woman. Huldah’s message from God that was brought back to

King Josiah confirmed that he was justified in being so visibly distraught. Her message in 2 Kings 22:15–20 confirmed that the Book of the Law was declaring God's wrath against Judah: ". . . *my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched*" (2 Kings 22:17).

There are sobering applications from this account in scripture (cf. 2 Kings 22:3–20) placed into the setting of twenty-first century Christendom:

- Hilkiyah, the high priest, was counting the money. The god-designed role for a high priest was to go before God for the people rendering spiritual service. That role had been reduced to material matters — ". . . *have him get ready the money that has been brought into the temple of the LORD . . .*" (2 Kings 22:4). In modern terms Hilkiyah had reduced his responsibility to counting the contribution. Are there any parallels in that to what is seen today?
- The workers, "*the carpenters, the builders and the masons*" (2 Kings 22:3), were spending their time on the house of the LORD. This would be parallel to all the LORD's workers today taking care of the church building.
- The workers were honest men. They were good brethren. They had just somehow slipped into the pattern of taking care of the house of the LORD. They were honest people who were mistaking their mission.
- Hilkiyah, the high priest, by chance found a copy of the Law in the house of the LORD and passed it onto Shaphan without even reading it himself. He was the high priest! He was supposed to daily read that Law, but that was not where his life had been going.
- Shaphan, the secretary, who should have been skilled in the knowledge of the Law according to Ezra's pattern (cf. Ezra 7:10), read it, but there was no spiritual concern stimulated in the reading of it. No instructive action took

place after he read it. He instead called it “*a book*” (cf. 2 Kings 22:10) in the same way that people might refer to a magazine, a newspaper, or a television newscast in the twenty-first century. Is anything happening like that today? How many Christians do not even pick up The Book as they go to Bible class? Or if they are there, have not even bothered spending fifteen minutes of preparation for what is going to be taught that day? Are there parallels between King Josiah's time and today?

- There is nothing to indicate that the workers had any contact with the Law of God at all. They were busy, honest brethren who were taking care of the church building. There is no record of any studying of The Law. How much does “*the Law of the LORD*” concern Christians today?
- If King Josiah had not heard “*the Law of the LORD*,” there seemingly would have been no concern, no change, no research, no response, no reformation, and no restoration. Josiah did go into action and tried to bring about reformation and restoration.

As a parallel, how many Christians are involved personally in trying to bring about a reformation and restoration of Christendom today to what God wants it to be? That is a rather sobering thought. The challenge is there for all. How subtle Satan is to bring those who are disciples of the LORD Divine into such a state of indifference. These questions are not meant to be judgmental. It is important to bring this into the minds of Christians today — could the Church today drift into a pattern in any way akin to the atmosphere in which Jeremiah was working? It is important to look deeply into the Book of Jeremiah as a whole and to notice once again the concise outline beautifully put together throughout the book.

An Outline of Jeremiah

- I. **Introduction** (Chapter 1)
- II. **Jeremiah's Prophecies Against Judah and Jerusalem** (Chs. 2–45)
 - God's Charge to the Prophet Received and Carried Out (Chs. 2–25)(Jeremiah 1:1–9).
 - The Reaction of the People to the Prophet (Chs. 26–36)(Jeremiah 1:17–19).
 - God's Promise Fulfilled by the Desolation and Destruction in Judah (Chs. 37–45)(Jeremiah 1:11–16).
- III. **Jeremiah's Prophecies Against the Nations** (Chs. 46–51)(Jeremiah 1:10: "*over the nations*").
 - Egypt (Ch. 46)
 - Philistia, Tyre, Sidon (Ch. 47)
 - Moab (Ch. 48)
 - Ammon (49:1–6)
 - Edom (49:7–22)
 - Damascus (49:23–27)
 - Kedar and Hazor (49:28–33)
 - Elam – including Media (49:34–39)
 - Babylon (Chs. 50–51)
- IV. **A Review of Judah's Ruin** (Ch. 52)

Jeremiah's Call, Commission, and Commander

The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile (Jeremiah 1:1–3).

Some have speculated whether or not this Hilkiah was the same Hilkiah, the high priest, mentioned in 2 Kings 22. That is not known. These first verses in the Book of Jeremiah confirm that Jeremiah was the son of one of the priests at Anathoth. It also confirms that he was from a prominent family in the territory of Benjamin in the nation of Judah. The word of the LORD did come to him and he did serve as a prophet of God beginning with the reign of Josiah through the reigns of Jehoiakim until the people of Jerusalem went into exile under the reign of Zedekiah. Jeremiah's prophetic work covered a period of forty years from 627–586 B.C. when the nation of Judah finally fell.

Notice that when “*word of the LORD*” came to Jeremiah God said:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5, NIV).

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations”
(Jeremiah 1:5, KJV)

This verse is one of the special, inspired statements of God's providential planning for people. In this verse note the specific plans God had for Jeremiah. Also note what these specific words mean concerning God's plans for Jeremiah:

- “*I formed you in the womb*”— divinely developed
- “*I knew you*”— divinely discerned
- “*I set you apart*”— divinely desired
(“*I consecrated you* [NAS], *I sanctified you*” [KJV])
- “*I appointed you as a prophet to the nations*”— divinely dispatched

This verse is specifically emphasized to show that God had a mission for this man. This verse is one of those clear statements that teach that God is no respecter of persons, so rest assured that God has a plan for everyone. He has a specific plan and mission for each person. Compare this verse to the verse regarding God's mission for Paul in Galatians 1:15–16:

But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man.

Paul was called to be an apostle when he was in his mother's womb.

This message is not just about Jeremiah or Paul. God has a mission for You and me. Do I know what God's mission is for me? Have I asked God in prayer to help me recognize His purpose for my life? A true sense of duty and direction is given in these expressions. This does not mean that you and I have to become whatever God makes us to be. Many have failed in God's mission for them. Consider the fact that in Jeremiah 1:6 Jeremiah himself told God He had made a mistake: "*Ah, Sovereign LORD . . . I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.*" Jeremiah later repented of that statement as is seen in Lamentations 3:27 when he said, "*It is good for a man to bear the yoke when he is young.*" God knows what He is doing and men should want God's will in their lives so that it is possible ". . . *in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). It is a sobering thought to question whether or not we have been conscious of God's call and assignment for us. His word reveals ways in which to serve and what to do.

Notice that when Jeremiah tried to tell God He was wrong in choosing a young man to be God's prophet, God did not respond with anger. God did not respond with anger as He did

with Moses in Exodus 4:14 “. . . *the LORD's anger burned against Moses . . .*” God was angry with Moses when he gave excuses. It seems that God was aware that Jeremiah was just awed by the tremendous assignment that he had been given. So God reassured Jeremiah with the words in Jeremiah 1:7:

“. . . ‘Do not say, “I am only a child.” You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.’”

Thus God tried to reassure His prophet that he would be equal to what God wanted him to do.

The Sobering Two-Fold Assignment

After God reassured Jeremiah telling him not to be afraid, God gave Jeremiah the following sobering assignment in Jeremiah 1:9–10:

Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

It is easy to read through these verses and not grasp the significance of Jeremiah's assignment in Jeremiah 1:10. Notice the following words and their significance:

Jeremiah's Prophetic Work Preacher's Work (2 Tim 4)

“uproot” (bottom)

“correct, rebuke and . . .

“tear down” (top)

“destroy” (tear up)

“overthrow” (throw away) encourage — with great

<i>"build"</i> (replace)	<i>patience and careful</i>
<i>"plant"</i> (decorate/beautify)	<i>instruction."</i>

- God told Jeremiah he needed to *"uproot,"* telling him he needed to go to the bottom of things. Some Christians may not study as deeply as they need to study.
- God told the prophet to *"tear down,"* telling him to go all the way to the top of things searching it out.
- God told Jeremiah to *"destroy and overthrow."* There were some things that Jeremiah needed to tear up. Certainly there were things in Judah that needed to be thrown away and destroyed. Notice in 2 Kings 23–24 that King Josiah on more than one occasion took the idols, burned them outside the city, ground them up into a powder, and scattered the dust or the rubble that was left: *"Furthermore, Josiah got rid of . . . the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem"* (2 Kings 23:24). There are some things that need to be thrown away.
- There was also a positive nature to Jeremiah's assignment. God told him to *"build."* He was to replace what had been torn down and thrown away.
- Jeremiah was to *"plant"* or decorate and beautify. His assignment in Jeremiah 1:10 is parallel to Paul's instructions to Timothy the evangelist in 2 Timothy 4:1–5. There seems to be a parallel between Jeremiah and Timothy's assignments: *"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction"* (2 Timothy 4:2).

God assured Jeremiah that he would be able to handle his assignments and then He gave Jeremiah an outline for his work. It was not to be a happy work; it was trying, demanding, and painful. Sometimes sobering assignments such as Jeremiah's, Timothy's, and anyone involved in evangelism are necessary.

Jeremiah accomplished his assignment in a beautiful way. Are Christians today strong enough to do this kind of work?

God sent two visions to Jeremiah to make sure that he understood what he was going to face. It is one thing to deliver a sermon. It is another thing to receive the sermon and to understand it. First God said, "*What do you see, Jeremiah?*" (Jeremiah 1:11). "*I see the branch of an almond tree*" was Jeremiah's reply. Costen J. Harrell gives a very good description of the message God was delivering in this verse in his book, The Prophets of Israel.

In the vision of the almond tree occurs a play on words which is not preserved in our English translations. The Hebrew for "*almond tree*" — ***shaked*** and the word translated "*watched*" — ***shoked*** are much the same. The almond tree is given its name simply because it blossoms as early as January. It is the first to wake into new life after the sleep of winter. The almond blossom suggested to Jeremiah the "watchfulness" of God. During the evil years of King Manasseh, the grandfather of King Josiah, it had not seemed as if God was going to do anything (cf. Zephaniah 1:12), but He was on watch and about to execute His word as spoken through the prophet in Jeremiah 1:12: "... *You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.*"¹⁵

The substance of Jeremiah's vision then was that God was now preparing with concern, chastisement, and certainty to carry out the message that Jeremiah would be delivering. Once again God asked Jeremiah "*What do you see?*" "*I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north*" was Jeremiah's reply (cf.

¹⁵ Harrell, Costen J., The Prophets of Israel, Cokesbury Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1961, p. 122.

Jeremiah 1:13). Then God explained what the vision meant: *“From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdom.”* (Jeremiah 1:14).

So many conditions in the countries to the North were already automatically brewing and ready to pour down through the countries of Moab, Ammon, and Judah to make these nations a part of the Babylonian conquest. It was spoken as coming from the North even though looking geographically at the map, Babylon was located East of Judah. Remember the travel pattern that Abraham followed in Genesis 11—12; he went up to Haran in the North and then came down into what became the Promised Land of Judah. That is the same route that would be followed later. In Jeremiah 25 the prophet named Babylon as the place that would conquer Judah.

In these visions God gave Jeremiah an insight into what He was going to do to His people. Why was God going to summon the people from the northern kingdoms to do this to Judah? In Jeremiah 1:15–16 God gave three reasons for His actions and what was to unfold in the Book of Jeremiah:

- *“their wickedness is forsaking me”* represented their departure from God.
- *“burning incense to other gods”* represented their devotion not to God but to other gods.
- *“worshiping what their hands have made”* represented their deification of self. They made themselves gods; then they wanted to tell God what to do and when to act.

Jeremiah 1:17–19 is the climax of the first chapter in the Book of Jeremiah:

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For,

behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee (KJV).

“Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD (NIV).

These verses were Jeremiah's wake-up call that his mission to the nations and his commission to his own people were about to begin. Notice the following breakdown and definitions to see the significance of what God was telling Jeremiah to do:

- **“Gird up thy loins”** — in any arrangement in the type of attire worn during Jeremiah's day that meant *“Get yourself ready!”* as the NIV states it.
- **“arise”** — that meant to proceed and as was often the case with Jeremiah, God called on him to arise early.
- **“speak”** — God called for Jeremiah to proceed and then to proclaim.
- **“unto them”** — Notice that it was not only a matter of preaching, Jeremiah was called to preach to his people.
- **“all”** — It was not only a matter of preaching to the people. There were directional and specific commands

which God gave. Jeremiah was called to preach to them **“all”** that He had commanded. This was a significant addition telling Jeremiah the degree to which he was to speak. It is the same degree to which Paul declared in Acts 20:20, 27 when he told the elders from Ephesus that he had held nothing back and declared to them the whole counsel of God. There is such a need in the twenty-first century for balance. It is important to have the fundamental and unique patterns from the mind of God in the Lord's Church today. Some in earlier years seemed to have and teach **“all,”** but they often taught it with a caustic and debating spirit so that there was a problem with the attitude in which it was taught. The Church needs the grace and spirit of the Lord in our hearts, but we also need the foundational principles. God called Jeremiah to preach **“all.”**

- **“that I command”** — Jeremiah was called to preach **“all that I command”** making sure there was a **“thus sayeth the LORD.”** Jeremiah filled his book with those very expressions.
- **“thee”** — Jeremiah and all Christians today are dependent upon God's help. They will not succeed without Him.
- **“be not dismayed”** — Jeremiah faced the dangers of being swayed into having the same spirit of the people of that day.
- **“I have made you”** — God assured Jeremiah that he did not have to be dismayed before his own people because there was a divine development. God said, **“I have made you . . .”**
 - ▶ **“a fortified city”** — God assured Jeremiah there was a secure setting.
 - ▶ **“a pillar of iron”** — God assured Jeremiah of a stabilized stand.
 - ▶ **“walls of bronze”** — God assured Jeremiah he was going to be sturdy, withstanding all that was to come.

This was the promise from God to Jeremiah. He did not fully understand God's promises for some twenty years. It took at least twenty years before Jeremiah knew how much God was going to take care of him.

Keep these things in mind. There will be people who will fight against Christians today. Have the spirit and disposition of Jeremiah the prophet of God because God was well pleased with the end product. Be what God wants His children to be, fulfilling His purpose and His assignments.

A Pleading, Perceptive Proclamation

Jeremiah 2:1–4:2

Introduction

The sixth chapter of this book covering the Book of Jeremiah looked at the call of Jeremiah, the things involved in the call, the response of the prophet, the circumstances in the land at that time, and what God intended to do for the country and for His prophet. All of this information is covered in Jeremiah 1.

Jeremiah 2 has a splendid example of both God's pleading and His perception of the conditions in the land of Judah. This seventh chapter could be outlined in two or three different ways. One possible outline could center around the questions God asked of Judah. There are sixteen questions that demonstrate God's pleading to and His perception of Judah's sins including where those sins would take them if they did not repent (cf. Jeremiah 2:5, 11, 14, 17, 18, 21, 24, 28, 29, 31, 32, 36). In reality there are three more questions Judah should have asked (cf. Jeremiah 2:6, 8, 23). All these questions help to identify God's pleading on one hand and His perception of the conditions in the nation on the other hand. A better outline for this particular study might be the one listed here.

A Pleading, Perceptive Proclamation

I. The Past Picture (Jeremiah 2:1–4)

- II. The **Present** Picture of God's Fidelity and Judah's Folly (Jeremiah 2:5–8)
- III. Plaintive Pleas Including a Comparison and a Contrast (Jeremiah 2:9–13)
- IV. The **Current** Conditions and the Cause (Jeremiah 2:14–19)
- V. A Caricature of **Judah's Corruption** (Jeremiah 2:20–30)
- VI. A Parting Plea to Judah: **Wake Up** (Jeremiah 2:31–35a)
- VII. A **Prophetic Promise** of the Price Judah Will Have to Pay (Jeremiah 2:35b–37)
- VIII. **Promiscuous Patterns** Presented in a Parable (Jeremiah 3:1–4:2)
 - A. A Parabolic Charge of Judah's Promiscuous Patterns (Jeremiah 3:1–5)
 - B. A Kindred Pattern of Perversion by Israel (Jeremiah 3:6–11)
 - C. The Possibilities Through Penitence Plainly Presented (Jeremiah 3:12–19)
 - D. Divine Perception Demands Penitence and Correction (Jeremiah 3:20–25)
 - E. Confession Without Correction (Jeremiah 3:22–25)
 - F. The Pleading Possibility (Jeremiah 4:1–2)

A Pleading, Perceptive Proclamation

In the first section of this outline as God remembered the past, He commended the attitude of Judah when He spoke of “*I remember the devotion of your youth . . .*” (Jeremiah 2:1–4). Not only did He speak of the attitude of Judah but also the affection of Judah. The New Kings James Version says, “. . . *The love of your betrothal . . .*” talking about the kind of affection Judah had for God. It was high quality love as in good quality relationships, a proper love. The New International Version says, “*I remember the devotion of your youth, how as*

a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.” The Hebrew word used for “love/loved” in this verse includes all the positive aspects of love for building strong relationships.

God remembered and commended Judah for the active response of His children as they followed after Him in a land described as “*a land not sown.*” The children of God did not follow God into a fertile land with a mansion upon the hill. That was not where or why they followed God. They had the right motives for following God. They were following **after** God Himself rather than following Him for the plush life He could offer them. They followed God into and through the wilderness.

God commended Judah for what they had done. God even remembered the amorous association with the people: “*Israel was holy to the LORD.*” This was the beautiful way God wanted to remember the people. He could remember the generation who had followed after Him in the wilderness in that way.

In Jeremiah 2:5–8 God reasoned with Judah concerning the kind of heartening relationship He wanted to have with them and the change they needed to make. God did this in a beautiful way using a high level of argumentative, probing questions. God seems to display reasons for their disloyalty by placing upon them a mantle of loyalty and disloyalty on Himself. Notice in this section God asked: “*‘What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me?’*”

How wonderful it is of God to reason with His children as He did with the nation of Judah. He asked: What covenant have I broken? What deceit have I practiced? What promises have I disregarded? What unrighteousness have you found in Me? This is almost the challenge of wounded love crying out, **“Can’t we work things out?”**

Then God identified Judah’s departure from Him, “*‘They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves’*” (Jeremiah 2:5). A good description of Judah’s departure might

be the cliché: “Going, Going, Gone!” God knew that His children had strayed. In describing Judah as going, He said they *“strayed so far from me.”* Judah not only walked far away from God, but they went so far as to walk after emptiness: *“‘They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.’”* They strayed so far from God, and they had become empty themselves. And then they were gone! What injustice could the children of God have possibly seen in Him? Was any of this God’s fault? Of course, it was not.

Not only did the people in the nation of Judah turn away from God, but in Jeremiah 2:7 God revealed that they had *“‘. . . defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.’”* Then God began to unfold why this condition had come about:

“‘. . . But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols’” (Jeremiah 2:7–8.)

The priests who should have been making petitions for the people were not inquiring of God. Those who handled the Law did not know God, so there were no precepts for the people. The rulers of the land transgressed against God. The prophets prophesied by Baal. The summation statement can be found in Jeremiah 2:8. The King James Version says, They *“‘. . . walked after things that do not profit.’”* There is no profit for those who walk that particular path. A brief summation of what the nation of Judah had lost would include:

- From the priests, there was no sacrifice for sins.
- From the scribes, there was no study of the scriptures.
- From the pastors/rulers, there was no spiritual sustenance or strength to guide them.

- From the false prophets, there was no heavenly help or message from above.

Such was the sad condition that had come upon the people of Judah! Within the first eight verses of Jeremiah 2 it moves from what **could have been** to what was actually happening in the land.

“Therefore I bring charges against you again,” declares the LORD. “And I will bring charges against your children’s children. Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this: Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,” declares the LORD. “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:9–13).

These next verses are the plaintive pleas from God which included a comparison and a contrast. God used the comparison of Kittim (likely this was Cyprus) and Kedar, people who had their false gods, but they were content with them. They were dedicated to their deities. Here were a people who were showing an appreciation for and respect for gods even though they were not really gods at all. God asked the question, “What has happened between God and His people?” This portrays the sad picture of people making foolish decisions. There is a contrast between even pagan gods and a pagan people who were doing a better job reasoning-wise than God’s people were before Him. Thus, we need to pause to ask if Christians today are doing any better.

Brother Bill Banowsky, when he gave the lectures on Jeremiah in 1961 at the Fort Worth Christian College Lectureships, made the following observations about Judah seeking water from a dry hole. They had turned away from God, the Fountain of Living Waters, and turned to a cistern which was broken and could give them no water:

Thus the sum and substance of the charge that Jeremiah is called to make are that Israel has left God in a self-seeking search for a more exciting place to drink. What an inconceivable act of folly. Only our humanity can explain why we should spurn the pure stream of grace that alone can quench our thirst in a mad scramble to gulp the muddy mixture of a cracked well¹⁶ . . . Our standard of living floods our lives with luxury and comfort that arouses the envy of history's princes and kinds. More money runs through our fingers in a single year than our great granddaddies could earn in a lifetime. In our haste to push back new frontiers we have broken the sound barrier and the four minute mile. We have harnessed the mighty atom and shattered the prohibitive veil of outer space. In short, we have conquered everything but ourselves! The American people with their new cistern are so happy that 20,000 of us, having everything to live with and nothing to live for, committed suicide last year. Our tranquilizers, coronaries, nervous disorders, and ulcers testify to the intensity of our thirst. Oh, we are looking for something! We are so well adjusted that 1 million of us are chronic alcoholics, 60,000 of us advanced narcotics

¹⁶ Banowsky, Bill, "Jeremiah" The Old Testament Books and Their Messages in the Christian Age, Fort Worth Christian College Lectureship, The Manney Company, Fort Worth, Texas, 1961. p. 309-310.

addicts, and half our hospital beds are filled with the mentally ill. Forsaking Jehovah we have bowed before many heathen gods in our quest for a new fountain. We have worshiped like an enormous mass in the timeless fantasy that wealth produces happiness. In addition, a new illusive idol offering salvation through science and education has arisen. And with our excessive allotment of leisure in an affluent society we over eat, over drink, over sex, and over play.¹⁷

What a sad statement! And yet that was the problem for Judah. The questions must be asked, are Christians today doing much better? That is not a description of all the American people, but to what degree do we parallel with those who left God, the Fountain of Living Waters, and sought out our solutions in a cistern that has no water?

The current conditions and their cause are given in Jeremiah 2:14–19. Not only had God’s people gone after other gods, but they had also surrendered to other nations. In those five verses, Judah sought after other solutions and security through contacts with Egypt and Assyria. They had traded Jehovah God seeking strengths somewhere else.

A descriptive climax of Judah’s corruption is given in the final verses of Jeremiah 2. They were described as wanderers in Jeremiah 2:20–23: “. . . *You are a swift she-camel running here and there . . .*” She had given into spiritual whoredom. Not only was Judah pictured as wandering, obsessed with idolatry following after the Baals, but in Jeremiah 2:24, she was pictured as one running wild. In her desires she assumed that she was secure and thus in some kind of noisy merriment she burst forth like a donkey braying and an easy prey for anyone who wanted her.

¹⁷ Banowsky, Bill, “Our National Purpose”, Article in Life Magazine, June 1960.

Jeremiah 2:25 describes the next stage for Judah. She was wayward and said: “. . . *‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.’*” First, she wandered, then she was wild, and then she was wayward in what she was doing. She was like a group of young people going out to have a good time. They run hither and yon trying to find something. When they find it, they make their own choices without listening to anyone. Judah was no longer wandering, they were wayward and doing those things which they would have to pay for.

Jeremiah 2:26 really ties back to Jeremiah 2:8 and the reasons for their trouble: “. . . *the house of Israel is disgraced — they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets.*” They began to realize their time of trouble. God was prophetically moving ahead telling Israel how bad it was going to be some day as the kings, princes, priests, prophets, and all the problem-producing people cried out. One day all these influential people were going to acknowledge God with a desperate cry, “Arise and save us!” God was trying to wake them up before that cry came too late.

“You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, ‘We are free to roam; we will come to you no more?’ Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number. How skilled you are at pursuing love! Even the worst of women can learn from your ways. On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in. Yet in spite of all this you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned’” (Jeremiah 2:31–35).

These verses were a parting plea from God as he begged Judah to wake up from their wickedness, but they did not heed His word. He reverted back to that beautiful time mentioned in

Jeremiah 2:2 remembering their betrothals and making a plea for what they once had been. Earlier God had cried out that His people had forsaken Him, and then He cried that they had forgotten Him. Forsaken and forgotten is a sad picture. He unveiled the display of “*the lifeblood of the innocent poor*” that was found on their clothes. It was a picture identifying the shame that could no longer be covered up.

A parallel of this picture can be seen in the history of the presidency of the United States of America during the Clinton-Lewinsky Saga in 1995–1998. The President of the USA emphatically and boldly declared that he was innocent. That is what the people of Judah declared: “. . . *I am innocent; he is not angry with me . . . I have not sinned*” (Jeremiah 2:35). Later DNA evidence on a dress made it evident to all that the President was indeed guilty and even then he tried to move away from that evidence and wanted to be considered the leader of our nation. Considering that, how different is America from what Judah had become? We know the price they were going to pay. We know God was going to bring judgment upon them. That judgment is listed in Jeremiah 2:35–37:

- God said their alliance with Egypt would do them no good. Egypt was going to bring shame upon them.
- God told them they would go out from this place with their hands upon their heads. They would be enslaved.
- God said they would be rejected by the ones they had trusted.
- God said they would not prosper with the people they had given their trust to.

In this manner God closed out Jeremiah 2 with the plaintive plea, “Wake up from your wickedness!”

Promiscuous Patterns Presented

Jeremiah 3:1–4:2 covers the stages of the promiscuous patterns of Judah. Notice these stages:

- A parabolic charge of Judah's promiscuous patterns.
- A kindred pattern of perversion by Israel.
- The possibilities through penitence plainly presented.
- Divine perception demands penitence and correction.

Jeremiah 3:1–5 identifies the beautiful possibilities of marital bliss where purity and pleasure blend together for one of the highlights in anyone's sojourn on this earth. Since this is a parable consider the beautiful possibility of marital bliss squandered through salacious sex into a perverse pattern that lead the people far away from God. Surely that was one of the "high crimes" of carnal conduct. That was what God was dealing with. Had Judah traded God off for just one god that would have been bad enough, but in Jeremiah 3:1 God accused Judah of being a harlot with many lovers:

"If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers — would you not return to me?" declares the LORD.

Remember in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 in the marriage covenant if one found his wife to be unfaithful and he put her away, she could not come back.

The verses in Jeremiah 3 are dealing in a context of people trying to come back to God, but it is the way they do it that is shameful and sad. Undoubtedly this was during the times of Josiah and the reformation he brought about. It was a time when they were trying to return (cf. Jeremiah 3:1, 6, 10). God stated that Judah did not return ". . . *with all her heart, but only in pretense.*" The people did come back, but not in the way they should have. Jeremiah 3:3 says, ". . . *Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame.*" Further along in Jeremiah 3 there were confessions and an approach that should have been good, but was actually bad.

The verses in Jeremiah 3:6–11 regarding Israel go back to the time of 1 Kings 16:30–33, 18:18 when Elijah was dealing with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah. Within Israel, the northern kingdom “I” idolatry was the problem and that is the picture in these verses. God was trying to present that picture to Judah of what Israel had been. Then He identified the fact that Judah had done the same thing:

“I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery” (Jeremiah 3:8).

Judah was doing exactly the same thing Israel had done. God wanted Judah to see the price Israel had paid and all they had gone through.

In Jeremiah 3:12–19 God was trying to tell Judah that penitence could still be carried out by Israel and He would listen even though they were now in Assyrian captivity:

*“‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful . . . I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your **guilt** — you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me’”* . . . (Jeremiah 3:12–13).

The King James Version uses the word “*iniquity*” instead of “*guilt*.” The term “*iniquity*” is used 23 times in Jeremiah and six more times in Lamentations. It is a broad term identifying a broad spectrum of sin.

God’s final charge to Israel was “*You have not obeyed me.*” Even though Israel had departed from God in these ways, He was willing to let them come back. In Jeremiah 3:14–19 there

is the picture of what God was willing to do for these people if they would only return:

“Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband. I will choose you — one from a town and two from a clan — and bring you to Zion. Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,” declares the LORD, “men will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made. At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance. I myself said, ‘How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.”

God told Israel they would have a dwelling place in Zion and offered them a chance to come out of captivity and back to their home land. He promised that when they returned they would have shepherds who would lead them with principles and truths and precepts that would feed them with knowledge for the direction they ought to take. Shepherds would provide understanding for the decisions they needed to make.

Jeremiah 3:16–18 is a messianic prophecy of the time when the ark of the covenant would not guide any more because a Messiah would have come. The Messiah is not named and the word Messiah is not even used, but He described circumstances

in regard to the Jerusalem that will be *“The Throne of the LORD.”* This is surely a parallel, not with the geographical Jerusalem, but to the Jerusalem in Galatians 4:21–31, which is the heavenly Jerusalem. The heavenly *“Jerusalem that is above”* was speaking of the redemptive plan for God’s people, the Church, under Jesus Christ.

God presented all these possibilities to His children. Then in Jeremiah 3:19 He told them He would gladly treat them like sons. They could be His children and call Him *“Father.”* What a beautiful picture of a marvelous opportunity again with God trying to get His children to come back to Him.

There is a blunt turn directionally in Jeremiah 3:20–25 as God declared to Israel how they had dealt treacherously with Him. He mentioned the weeping and supplication by Israel again, how they were hurting in captivity, how they knew they had done wrong. God was pleading with Judah to listen and to see the example of Israel so they would come back to Him.

Jeremiah 3:22–25 sounds like God’s pleading worked because there is a splendid confession of the wrong they had done. They acknowledged that God is the One who should be followed. They had been deceived by seeking salvation through the *“idolatrous commotion on the hills and mountains . . . shameful gods . . . the fruits of our fathers’ labors . . .”* They confessed to being consumed by idolatry and also acknowledged their shame and disgrace. They confessed to having sinned against *“. . . the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God.”* The core cause of their problems was that they had not obeyed the voice of God. Their confession of guilt in Jeremiah 3:25 matched exactly what God had asked for in Jeremiah 3:13. They acknowledged their guilt. This looked like a perfect confession, but the real problem was still there as God described it in Jeremiah 3:10: *“In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me **with all her heart, but only in pretense,**’ declares the LORD.”*

This section of study ends with Jeremiah 4:1–2. God did not accept their good confession. He continued to say: *“If you will return, O Israel, return to me.”* These verses are included in this section because it is the rest of the story. God wanted them to return and these verses are a good example of what they had to do, but the deed was not done. There was an intent, but not an involvement, there was a confession without any correction. Any time there is a confession made with deception, there will not be any correction. That is the problem in this picture of Israel and Judah. Sadly God had to continue His pleading: “. . . if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory.”

That is what **could have been**. God perceived their problem, He pleaded with His children to do right, and they would not. Where are you in your relationship with Jehovah God? His children today need to see the problems and mistakes Israel and Judah made and do better ourselves.

Preview and Peril Presented to Warn

Jeremiah 4:3–6:8

Introduction

The previous chapter of this study over the Book of Jeremiah covered God's pleading proclamation to the nation of Judah. The latter part of Jeremiah 3 and into chapter 4 covers the problem of Judah making confessions, but they did not correct their lives. Beginning in Jeremiah 4 God said:

“If you will return, O Israel, return to me . . . If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory” (Jeremiah 4:1–2).

These verses confirm that God saw through Judah's deceptive tactics of confessing their wrongs without repenting. He proceeded to warn Judah by pointing out the peril of not changing. Notice the following outline for Jeremiah 4–6:

Preview and Peril Presented to Warn

- I. **The Route to Escape God's Wrath** (Jeremiah 4:3–31)
 - A. Plea to Plow and Circumcise Cities (4:3–4)

- B. Reasons to Flee to the Fortified Cities (Jeremiah 4:5–9)
- C. Remonstrance and Ruin for Their Rebellion (Jeremiah 4:10–13)
- D. Will Judah Repent or Rebel? (Jeremiah 4:14–18)
- E. Results After the Warning (Jeremiah 4:19–31)
- II. **The Nature of Judah's Rebellion** (Jeremiah 5:1–31)
 - A. Moral Corruption (Jeremiah 5:1–6)
 - B. Sexual Impurity (Jeremiah 5:7–9)
 - C. Treacherous Unbelief (Jeremiah 5:10–18)
 - D. Religious Apostasy (Jeremiah 5:19–24)
 - E. Social Injustice (Jeremiah 5:25–29)
 - F. International Deception (Jeremiah 5:30–31)
- III. **Raging Legions Are Coming** (Jeremiah 6:1–30)
 - A. Babylonian Army (Jeremiah 6:1–5)
 - B. A Reminder of Judah's Ways (Jeremiah 6:6–8)
 - C. Heed the Warnings God Has Given (Jeremiah 6:9–12)
 - D. A Reminder of How God's Judgement Happened (Jeremiah 6:13–17)
 - E. Rejection of Judah Was Reasonable (Jeremiah 6:18–26)
 - F. Ruin as a Symbolic Summary (Jeremiah 6:27–30)

The Route to Escape God's Wrath

*This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: "Break up your **unplowed** ground and do not sow among thorns. **Circumcise** yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it" (Jeremiah 4:3–4).*

As God attempted to get His children to move in the right direction He used two figures of speech urging them to change.

First notice: “*Break up your **unplowed** ground . . .*” The King James Version uses the words “*Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns.*” “**Fallow**” is not a word that is used often, but both the English word “*fallow*” and the Hebrew term **nir** refer to the idea of plowing or working in virgin soil. The actual picture is one of going down into the virgin soil to break up the soil that has never been used. This is done by removing the briars, bushes, and weeds. Once that was done the people needed to keep removing the briars, bushes, and weeds. God meant this as a clarification for looking deeply into something before the seeds were ever planted. God was telling Judah that was what they needed to do — they needed to dig deeply and make a change. God would not accept their vain confessions without correction. He would not be satisfied with what they had been willing to give.

In Jeremiah 4:4 God said they needed to “**circumcise**” their hearts. At various places in Scripture God says to circumcise the ears so that a person can listen better. He also says to circumcise the lips so that one can speak properly. But if one really wants to get down to the deepest level, a man must circumcise his heart. Judah needed to break up their unplowed ground by circumcising their hearts. That was the type of change God called for them to make in order to escape His wrath.

In Jeremiah 4:5–9 God warned Judah about the coming destruction. He urged them to flee to fortified cities. It was imperative that they **do** something! There were going to be three different stages of destruction:

- First the land and the nation were going to become a “*waste . . . land*” referring to the fact that Judah had lost their purpose by wasting time trying to reach their own goals for life.
- Their towns were going to become “*ruins*” referring to the fact that they had lost their power. They could no longer produce. They were ruined!

- And finally they were going to be “*without inhabitants*” meaning they had lost the people.

Judah was going to lose its **purpose**, its **power**, and its **people**. Danger is always pending when there is this kind of result. God pleaded with the people to flee into the fortified cities not because those cities were going to be spared because the whole country was going to be destroyed. However, God used this plea to “*flee to the fortified cities*” to let Judah know that there was still something they could do. They could flee to the places where there would be security.

Notice that apparently God had His doubts about their ability to change: “*In that day . . . the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled*” (Jeremiah 4:9). God actually predicted the fall of the leaders of Judah and thus there would be remonstrance, a protest, about the upcoming ruin resulting from their rebellion (cf. Jeremiah 4:10–13).

At this point Jeremiah protested that God had “*completely . . . deceived this people*” by telling them they could have peace even “*. . . when the sword is at our throats.*” Why did Jeremiah use this particular phrasing? Is God the One who deceives? God was the deceiver only in the sense that the ones who had been producing the problem had not been eliminated by God. In that sense they were being deceived only because God was still permitting the false prophets and teachers to say and do things that were deceiving. These false prophets cried out “*Peace, peace*” repeatedly (cf. Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11, 14:13, 23:17) when God was saying there would be no peace and there was going to be destruction and desolation. Jeremiah fused those two things together saying that because God was allowing the false teachings to go on, then He was deceiving the people.

Some ask the question why God would allow those prophets to present a false doctrine as well as asking why He would allow the same thing to continue to happen in present

day? The answer for Jeremiah's day can be found in Jeremiah 5:31:

*"The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and **my people love it this way**. But what will you do in the end?"*

The key phrase in this verse is "*my people love it this way*." The same principle is presented by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10:

*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to **love the truth** and so be saved.*

God said that if His people refused to love the truth (His Word), then He would send a strong delusion so that they might believe a lie and be condemned. That is the sobering nature of God: when people want to do wrong, at least in this stage, He was allowing that wrong to prevail. Only in that sense was God deceiving these people.

Jeremiah 4:13 is a cry from the people lamenting the struggles that were coming upon them because of their rebellious ways. In Jeremiah 4:14–18 God asked the question "*How long . . . ?*" Will Judah repent or continue to rebel? God was still begging for their hearts. He wanted them to respond to Him and repent, so He called out:

*"O Jerusalem, **wash** the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts? A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim. 'Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: "A besieging army is*

*coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah. They surround her like men guarding a field, **because she has rebelled against me,**” declares the LORD. “Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!”*

These verses contain the warning that “*a besieging army*” will be stationed around the cities of Judah. They will lift up their voices against the besieged cities with taunts and demands and mockery. These armies would not stop until Judah totally surrendered. God continued to tell the people of Judah that the reason things were going to be like this was because of the way she had rebelled against God — “**Me.**” God had no choice. He had to finally bring war upon His own people because nothing else was going to change the stubborn hearts of that generation.

Beginning in Jeremiah 4:19–22 there is Jeremiah’s cry stating that his soul was in anguish as he was being torn asunder. His heart was pounding! The whole land of Judah was going to be devastated. Even though this had not happened yet, Jeremiah’s heart and mind were finally beginning to realize the depth and the intensity of what was coming. He cried out:

Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? (Jeremiah 4:20–21).

There is the cause and effect of Judah’s rebellion — sinful seed was producing its evil fruit. As Jeremiah described the people, they were foolish. They had become senseless children with no understanding. They were rogues, dishonest and unprincipled children, who were certainly not reliable.

God said “. . . *they do not know me*” (Jeremiah 4:22). They had become irresponsible renegades. Think about people in a community who go about trying to see what they can tear up

next. In a more modern society think about gang shootings, drive by shootings. That is the kind of people who have no consideration for others. God through Jeremiah was saying “*My people are fools; they do not know me.*” The people had reached the level at which the New American Standard Version translates the verse as: “*For My people are **foolish**, They know Me not; They are stupid children, And they have no understanding. **They are shrewd to do evil, But to do good they do not know.***” “*Stupid*” is a very strong term. Other versions use the words “*senseless,*” “*silly,*” or “*dull, retarded children.*” The background for that word is resisting and stubborn children. Why had the people become this way? It was because they had no understanding. They were irrational. They were shrewd in doing evil, but they did not know how to do good. A parallel description is found in Ephesians 4:14 where Paul described people as children tossed to and fro:

. . . infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

There was no one with any stability. That is what was happening in Judah. The summary is they were shrewd to do evil, but to do good, they did not know it. This was the climax of the downward trend of the people.

In Jeremiah 4:23–26 God through Jeremiah wanted the people to see the conditions that would come to the land. These verses give the prophet’s painful perception. Each verse begins with “*I looked . . . I looked . . . I looked . . .*” What did you see, Jeremiah? He saw the sad scenes of things shaking and shattered, tossed and heaving, and nothing was left. Jeremiah 4:23 uses the words “*formless and empty / without form and void.*” These are the same expressions which are used both in the English and in Hebrew in Genesis 1:2 to describe the condition of the earth before God began His creation process. Jeremiah saw that “*. . . there were no people; every bird in the*

sky had flown away” (Jeremiah 4:25). The people had become nothing.

Jeremiah also saw that even the land was going to be in the same awful predicament: “*The whole land will be ruined . . .*” (Jeremiah 4:27). This was the promised punishment from God. He gave the people the reasons why all of this was going to happen. God said: “. . . ***because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back***” (Jeremiah 4:28). The King James Version translates this verse: “. . . *because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it.*” The reasons for their downfall were:

- “*I have spoken it*” — God **declared** it would be this way!
- “*I have purposed it*” — God **devised** and planned it.
- “*I . . . will not repent, neither will I turn back*” — God would not change His mind. He was **determined**.

In Jeremiah 4:29–31 the pomp and plush presentation of the people is listed as they did their own things in order to flaunt themselves before other countries. They were making a presentation of themselves presenting what they considered to be an array of successes. They were courting other countries dressing up in scarlet and jewels of gold, shading their eyes with paint, and adorning themselves. God informed His children that all of their primping and pomp were in vain. This is the sad picture of the downfall of the nation of Judah.

Reasoning With the Rebellious Reasons for the Rebellion

Notice the outline format of Jeremiah 5:1–31 which covers the conditions of the people of Judah as they deteriorated even further. Jeremiah 5 gives a list of the six terrible sins of Judah:

- Moral corruption (vs. 1–6).
- Sexual impurity (vs. 7–9).
- Treacherous unbelief (vs. 10–18).
- Religious apostasy (vs. 19–24).
- Social injustice (vs. 25–29).
- Intentional deception (vs. 30–31).

These terrible sins were being committed throughout the land of Judah, and yet, notice that in Jeremiah 5:1 God called for Jeremiah to “*Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem . . .*” God told Jeremiah to search to see if he could find “. . . *but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth . . .*” If the prophet could find just one person, then God would save the city of Jerusalem and save the country. God our Father is truly willing to be patient with His children.

Notice the three conditions God gave for this “. . . *one person.*” God instructed Jeremiah to find someone who:

- Knew justice and truth after some diligent searching and seeking.
- Would execute and accomplish both truth and justice.
- Would be heard or heeded, received, and obeyed by the people of Judah.

The prophet Jeremiah was qualified to be this “*one person*” by the first two requirements, but tragically the people of Judah would not receive him. In fact, they reacted against him and did not pay attention to what he had provided for them. The last requirement was the most important one. God was looking for a man who would be heard and received and obeyed by these people.

Consequently in the summation, Jeremiah pointed out three circumstances for the reasons why he could not find a man who fit these requirements in Jeremiah 5:3–6:

“O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent. I thought, ‘These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God. So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God.’ But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds. Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.”

- God struck them, but they felt no pain.
- God crushed them, but they refused correction.
- They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

The people of Judah were rebellious children. They were like the child who has been spanked but says I am going to do it over and over again anyway. Jeremiah’s message, warnings from God, did not touch the people. That was the terrible response of these people. They refused “*correction*” — “*correction*” is the key word. It indicates the fact that instruction had been given, but the people refused to follow. It is impossible to teach someone who refuses correction and refuses to repent.

Notice that Jeremiah was ready to give up in despair. He said, “. . . *for their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.*” That is apostasy! These verses indicate the moral corruption in the land.

Beginning with Jeremiah 5:7, God Himself became more specific in identifying the sins of the people. He began by raising the question: “*Why should I forgive you?*” God cannot forgive people who commit both spiritual and domestic adultery. His children were committing spiritual adultery by

running to and fro devoting themselves to idolatry that was being done even by the priests and the prophets. The people were committing domestic adultery in a blatant, open, and bizarre conduct:

“ . . . I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. They are well-fed lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife ” (Jeremiah 5:7–8).

God identified His children as a stout and prosperous people. That is the sad and sickening scene of their sexual exploitations. It was as if they actually boasted concerning these matters. The King James Version says, *“ . . . when I had fed them to the full, they then committed adultery, and assembled themselves by troops in the harlots’ houses. ”* Such was the awful stage of moral corruption at the sexual level. Once again God questioned, *“ Should I not punish them for this? . . . Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? ”* (Jeremiah 5:9).

In addition to these charges of sexual impurity, God brought four more charges against the people. They had become unfruitful branches. Think about John 15:8 when Jesus said: *“ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. ”* God wants His people to *“ bear much fruit, ”* but these people had become unfruitful. They were not doing what God wanted done. They were not becoming who God wanted them to be.

The children of God had dealt treacherously with God. Then they tried to hide everything under a security they assumed they had. They assumed that God would do nothing. Thus they lied about the LORD and deceived each other. The ones who promoted these lies were the prophets telling the people that they would never see sword or famine. God described these men as *“ . . . but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them ”* (Jeremiah 5:13).

Therefore God said Judah’s fall would come like a fire to consume the people as though they were wood. God was also

going to bring in a mighty nation to devour and destroy. God did not name the nation at this point, but it is indeed Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar was already on his way toward establishing a world empire that would come to fill the “open graves.”

Judah’s downfall is graphically described by what they were about to lose in Jeremiah 5:15–17:

“O house of Israel,” declares the LORD, “I am bringing a distant nation against you — an ancient and enduring nation, people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand. Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors. They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters; they will devour your flocks and herds, devour your vines and fig trees. With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust.”

Notice that Judah was going to lose the following things:

- Your food — *“they will devour your harvests and food”*
- Your family — *“... devour your sons and daughters”*
- Your flocks — *“they will devour your flocks and herds”*
- Your fruit — *“devour your vines and fig trees.”*
- Your fortifications — *“destroy your fortified cities”*

Is there really any hope left for Judah? Ironically, there is because God assured them in Jeremiah 5:18: *“Yet even in those days,” declares the LORD, “I will not destroy you completely.”* God promised that there would be a few who would be preserved and they would repent and return to Him.

Throughout the rest of Jeremiah 5 God gave the reasons why the rebellion had happened. The people were rebelling because there was religious apostasy. This was the core cause for their rebellion. They had been forsaking God and serving

strangers in their own land. This fact is emphasized in Jeremiah 5:22 when God asked the question: *“Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in my presence?”* The people had gone through three degenerating stages that had assured their failure:

- They failed to fear and reverence God for **His presence**. Think about Isaiah’s reaction when he came into God’s presence in Isaiah 6:1–5. He cried out, *“Woe to me! . . . I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips . . .”* It would have been good if Judah had faced that fact as well.
- Judah did not respect or fear God for **His power**. God was able to control the boundaries of the seas and oceans, but that did not impress Judah. They took God’s power for granted.
- Judah did not properly respect or reverence God for **His provision**. God is the One who gives the seasons and the rains and the harvest, but Judah did not fear the LORD their God.

The people of Judah did not respect God for His presence, His power, or His provisions. God’s children are dependant upon all three of these things. Without any one of these, everyone would die. God saw the folly of Judah in every dimension and direction.

In Jeremiah 5:25–31 God mentioned even more stages of Judah’s disobedience. He said:

“Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good . . . A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?” (Jeremiah 5:25, 30–31).

Judah continued their disobedience in:

- Social disobedience — Men trapping men to enslave them (cf. Jeremiah 5:26).
- Economic disobedience — Men deceiving men in order to enrich themselves (cf. Jeremiah 5:27).
- Civil disobedience — Men refusing to execute judgment to do what was right to bring about justice for the people (cf. Jeremiah 5:28).
- Ecclesiastical disobedience — The religious leaders rejected God Himself (cf. Jeremiah 5:29–31).

It would be good to do a word study on Jeremiah 5:30 — *“a horrible and shocking thing.”* This verse identifies the rotten wickedness that had affected the prophets, the priests, and all the people in the land.

The fifth chapter of Jeremiah ends with the question: “. . . *But what will you do **in the end?***” (Jeremiah 5:31). All mankind will be there *“in the end!”* Everyone will be judged. Everyone will receive their sentence. Each one will be judged for what he has done. This is something that every man needs to consider.

Raging Legions Are Coming

Jeremiah 6 simply expands further the tragedies that were going to come upon the people of Judah. Raging legions of armies were coming. That simply identified the intensity of the warring forces that were coming. They would come and fight at noon and during the evening hours when the light was failing. These were times when normally armies would usually be settled, but these armies would still fight and destroy Judah (cf. Jeremiah 6:1–5).

In the violence, extortion, and defrauding that was underway in Jeremiah 6:6–8 God saw three things going on. He saw an oppression of the poor in which they were being subjected to daily fraud and deception. He saw a shameful, constant, carnal conduct that was happening at a violent level.

He saw sickness and wounds constantly before His eyes in the folly of His children.

Jeremiah 4–6 are the morbid chapters of the sad story of a people whom God was crying out to. He wanted His children to find the good way, but His people would not walk in it. The “*trumpet*” would sound to warn the people, but they would not listen.

Remorse, Reminders, and Rejection

Jeremiah 6:9–8:22

Introduction

The previous chapter of this study over the Book of Jeremiah covered Jeremiah 4–5 and portions of chapter 6. All three of these chapters identify the downward plunge of Judah into doom and desolation. In Jeremiah 6:1–5 remember there were raging legions coming as the armies of Babylon prepared to attack God’s children. There was a reminder of Judah’s ways identifying why this punishment was coming in Jeremiah 6:6–8. God said, “*Take warning, O Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it*” (Jeremiah 6:8). Finally in Jeremiah 6:9–12 there was a reminder of Judah’s refusal to heed God’s warnings as He tried to call them back. Outline for Jeremiah 6:13–8:22:

Remorse, Reminders, and Rejection

- I. **Six Steps to Ruin** (Jeremiah 6:13–15)
- II. **A Good Look at the “*Good Way*”** (Jeremiah 6:16–30)
- III. **A Plea to Those Who Come to Pray** (Jeremiah 7:1–8:3)
- IV. **Reasoning That Leads to Ruin** (Jeremiah 8:4–22)

Six Steps to Ruin

Jeremiah 6:13–17 presents six steps as a reminder for why Judah was plunged into ruin. These sad stages identify the thinking and actions that assured Judah’s desolation:

- **Unjust gain** — “*all are greedy for gain*” (Jeremiah 6:13). There were plots and plans that went with those greedy efforts.
- **Spiritual shame** — “*prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit*” (Jeremiah 6:13). “*All*” including the “*prophets and priests*” were dealing falsely which brought about spiritual shame for the nation.
- **Lying claim** — “*‘Peace, peace,’ they say when there is no peace*” (Jeremiah 6:14). The prophets and the priests were only slightly healing the wounds of God’s people. In truth, they were making Judah’s condition worse by the lies they told.
- **Deliberately defame** — “*they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush*” (Jeremiah 6:15). Abominations were stubbornly carried out and it did not bother the people to do wrong.
- **Deliberate disdain** — “*‘We will not walk in it’*” (Jeremiah 6:16). God appealed to His people to seek the Old Paths, but their response to that opportunity was a refusal to walk in “*the ancient paths.*”
- **Ruin’s Refrain** — “*‘We will not listen’*” (Jeremiah 6:17). After Judah rejected the good way, God said: “*I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But you said, ‘We will not listen.’*” That is how ruin came to Judah.

A Good Look at the “*Good Way*”

In Jeremiah 6:16 there is a statement that is like a beautiful diamond hidden in a chunk of rock. Notice this passage more fully:

*This is what the LORD says: “**Stand** at the crossroads and **look**; **ask** for the ancient paths, **ask** where the*

*good way is, and **walk** in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’”*

There are five steps involved in what the LORD asked the people of Judah to do. The LORD said:

- “*Stand by the ways and see . . .*” (NAS). The word “*see/look*,” especially in the Hebrew language, identifies a diligent search. It is not just a glance; it is a careful look. Be alert to what God is talking about.
- “*. . . ask for the old paths . . .*” (KJV). Assimilate or assess what was being said. Judah needed to check things out, do research, and investigate. That has always been God’s study pattern. He wanted them to search for the ancient ways.
- “*. . . ask where the good way is . . .*” (NAS). Judah needed to not only assess the old paths, but they needed to select and appreciate what God had offered. They needed to seek out the solid, sublime, “*good way*” so that they would appreciate and accept it.
- “*. . . and walk in it . . .*” God wanted Judah to activate themselves by stepping forth to serve. It does not do any good to find the “*good way*” unless one is willing to walk in it.
- “*. . . and you will find rest for your souls.*” It is often true with God’s appeals that there is a reward if one will respond to what He has asked. There is satisfaction in choosing the “*good way.*” God’s children need to appropriate the “*good way.*” The Hebrew term for “*rest*” is *margowa*, which indicates a calmness of mind and a clear conscience before God. That is a beautiful way to live by day and by night.

These five steps were an appeal from God to the people of Judah, but they did not accept it. God urged them to “*Stand . . . look . . . ask . . . ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and*

you will find rest for your souls. But . . . [the children of God] said, 'We will not listen.'" Even when the trumpet had sounded, they did not respond. They would not listen to God's warnings.

Beginning in Jeremiah 6:18–26 the prophet wrote about the fact that God's rejection of these people was reasonable because every effort God had made to draw them back to Him and to do what was right had been rejected by the people. Their ruin is symbolically seen in Jeremiah 6:27–30. The downfall of the people is identified by God with metallurgic phraseology:

*"I have made you a **tester of metals** and **my people** the ore, that you may observe and test their ways. They are all hardened rebels, going about to slander. They are bronze and iron; they all act corruptly. The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out. They are called **rejected silver**, because the LORD has rejected them."*

God had assayed/tested His children and Jeremiah *"called them rejected silver, because the LORD has rejected them."* God used the phraseology of one who tested metals and His people were the ore. They had been tested, but the refining fire was in vain. The NIV and KJV call them *"rejected silver."* The American Standard Version says, *"Refuse silver shall men call them, because Jehovah hath rejected them."*

G. Campbell Morgan in his book Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah breaks down the fact that this expression of *"rejected/refuse"* is actually found eight times in the first six chapters of the Book of Jeremiah.¹⁸

¹⁸ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1969. p. 42.

This term occurs no less than eight times in these earlier messages of the prophet. In Jeremiah 2:37, you find *“Jehovah has rejected those in whom thou trusted.”* In Jeremiah 3:3, you find the term used again, *“Thou refused to be ashamed.”* In Jeremiah 4:30, you find *“Thou lovest to despise thee.”* The word *“despise”* is the same term that is used in Jeremiah 6. In Jeremiah 5:3, you find *“They have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.”* That is the same word again. In Jeremiah 6:19, *“They have not hearkened unto my words, not to my law, but rejected it.”* Two times then it is used in that passage. And then finally in Jeremiah 6:30, *“They call them rejected silver, because the LORD has rejected them.”*

A Plea to Those Who Come to Pray

Different commentaries give different answers as to when Jeremiah 7 really occurred because there is mention made in Jeremiah 7:12–15 of God punishing the people like He did at Shiloh. There is the same type of expression made in Jeremiah 26:6 when God said, *“Then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.”* Some have concluded that Jeremiah 7 and 26 happened in the same time frame. I really do not believe they did. The time factor is given for Jeremiah 26:1: *“Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the LORD.”* I believe the information being given in Jeremiah 7 occurred during the reformation efforts of King Josiah. There are four reasons why I conclude that these chapters did not happen at the same time:

- In Jeremiah 7:12, 14, and 16 there are the following statements concerning Shiloh followed by God's appeal to Jeremiah:

“Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel . . . Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers . . . So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.”

In Jeremiah 26:6–8 immediately after Shiloh was mentioned and after Jeremiah had told “. . . *all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say, the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, ‘You must die!’*” Jeremiah would not have been pleading for the people at a time when they were threatening him with death. Those two events do not fit together.

- In Jeremiah 7:18 God sought to open Jeremiah's eyes to the fact of Judah's idolatrous patterns as they were coming to worship the LORD and crying out at the temple. This type of statement, “. . . *They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger*” would best fit the time when King Josiah was trying to bring about a reformation among the people. It would not fit into the context of Jeremiah 26 dealing with the mention of Shiloh when the people were crying out for the prophet's death.
- In Jeremiah 7:24–28 God sought to open Jeremiah's eyes to the fact that Judah would not listen to his words while in Jeremiah 26 the people were trying to kill him. In Jeremiah 26, the prophet surely knew the people were not

properly listening. However in the days of King Josiah, Jeremiah would have still retained the hope that the people would listen to him. Thus these factors fit the time of Josiah with the people coming to worship and with the effort being made by God to get Jeremiah to realize what was happening. Even though Jeremiah was hoping for a reformation during the time of Josiah, the people really were not listening to him.

- It is generally agreed that Jeremiah 7–10 gives three different speeches made by Jeremiah. All three of those messages relate to the worship of God and the Law of God and the Temple. These three things would have all been factors during the time when Josiah was trying to bring about reformation and restoration. Jeremiah 7 was an appeal for Judah to amend their ways with the hope for a change to come among the people. Jeremiah 8–10 were chapters identifying the folly of idolatry as compared to the supremacy and greatness of God. All of that would blend in with the reformation efforts. In Jeremiah 26 when evil King Jehoiakim reigned there was really not any hope for the people to amend their ways. His entire policy and his actions were to tear the people down.

Thus I conclude that Jeremiah 7 fits best with the reformation time of King Josiah and Jeremiah 26 with the time of King Jehoiakim.

The Place, the Plea, the Promise, and the Problem Presented

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Stand at the gate of the LORD’s house and there proclaim this message: ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD’” (Jeremiah 7:1–2).

The people of Judah came to worship and the appeal from God through Jeremiah was for them to amend their ways and their deeds. The devil is very happy when he can get people going in the right direction if they will do the wrong thing as they go. He is happy for people to pray especially when they do it through Mary or some saint instead of doing it the right way through the Mediator, Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). The devil is also very happy if people go the right way, but have the wrong attitude. When God's children worship in truth, they are doing the right thing, but as in Judah's case, when their hearts are not in it, that is the wrong way.

The devil will happily take either side of the coin. If people will only do things halfway and foul up the other half, then the devil is happy. If someone believes on the Lord, but denies baptism, he has the right attitude by believing on the Lord, but he is denying the right deed that needs to be accomplished in baptism. The devil is equally happy if someone does the reverse by baptizing a baby who cannot believe. There the deed has been done, but it has been done in the wrong way. People today also need to amend their ways. Do you see how this message can be applied today? The devil will be happy any time God's children do not walk in *"the good way."*

In Jeremiah 7:1–7 the place where the people were coming to worship was *"... through these gates to worship the LORD."* They were coming to the right place, but they were not worshiping as God wanted them to do. God pleaded with them to amend their ways giving them three things to avoid:

- *"Do not trust in deceptive words."* — Wrong Words.
- *"Do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood."* — Wrong Ways.
- *"Do not follow other gods."* — Wrong Walk.

God warned the people of Judah in this context in an attempt to change them into who they really ought to be. He urged them to watch out for wrong words, the wrong ways, and

the wrong walk. This section of scripture is meaningful for everyone. God's promise to Judah was if they would amend their ways "*then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers **for ever and ever***" (Jeremiah 7:7).

Beginning in Jeremiah 7:8–11, the problem is presented in regard to the nation of Judah. The abomination in Judah can be seen in the blending together of stealing, murder, adultery, and false swearing. Consider Jeremiah 7:31 and then add sacrificing their own children on the altar of Molech in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to these other abominations. Such was the type of thing being done. Judah had deceived themselves through their ungodly, wretched ways and believed that what they were doing was all right: ". . . *'We are safe' — safe to do all these detestable things?*" (Jeremiah 7:10). Consider again how modern day people look at the abortion situation, doing it and thinking that is the right way. People are even going to court to try and prove that abortion is right. It is tragic when people depart from God.

The Price to Be Paid

In Jeremiah 7:12–20 there are two references to Shiloh. The background for these verses comes from 1 Samuel 4:10–18 when the Philistines defeated the Israelites and captured the Ark of God. Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. Eli, the high priest, and his sons were killed that day. It was a day of infamy in Judah, a day full of dishonor and desolation. God pointed back to His judgment upon His people and promised Judah that He was going to punish them in a similar way if they did not change.

The persistent pattern of the people of Judah did not change even though God had warned them that He would burn them with a fire that could not be quenched (cf. Jeremiah 7:20). Judah was determined to continue in their evil deeds no matter what. They would not obey God's voice. Consequently in Jeremiah 7:24, Judah was described as a people who went backward instead of forward. This pattern describes a polluted

people who were not willing to listen, who did not hear even when He called with a special appeal.

Jeremiah 7:29–31 presents the real core cause of the pollution for the nation of Judah:

*“Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the LORD has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath. The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes,” declares the LORD. “They have set up their detestable **idols** in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire — something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.”*

Judah was obsessed with **idolatry**. They set up idols in the barren heights. They set up idols in the house of the LORD. They became so possessed that they bowed down to their idols in the Valley of Ben Hinnom by burning their sons and daughters in the fire.

Jeremiah 7:32–8:3 describes the promised punishment. God told His people that the Valley of Ben Hinnom would be called the Valley of Slaughter, not because all the babies had been killed there, but because there were going to be such a massive number of bodies from Judah slaughtered in that valley when the Babylonian army came. There would be so many slaughtered and left lying out in the open because there would be no room to bury them all. God pointed out that the bones of the kings, princes, priests, and the prophets would be left to bleach out in the midst of the gods all around them. There would be no solution for the people because they had rendered their devotion to idols who could give them nothing.

Reasoning That Leads to Ruin

Jeremiah 8:4–22 gives four different divisions for why God reasoned with His people. The reasoning of the people of Judah had finally led to their ruin.

- Judah refused to repent:

*“When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return? Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? **They cling to deceit; they refuse to return.** I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. **No one repents** of his wickedness, saying, “What have I done?” Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle . . . But my people do not know the requirements of the LORD”* (Jeremiah 8:4–7).

Judah wanted to appear as though they were innocent. It is impossible to change as long as one puts up a stout defense while going ahead with the ungodly deeds such as portrayed in Jeremiah 7. The people refused to hear and persisted in their ungodly patterns of evil.

- Judah refused to respect God’s Law:

*“How can you say, “We are wise, for we have the law of the LORD,” when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely? The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have **rejected the word of the LORD**, what kind of wisdom do they have?”* (Jeremiah 8:8–9).

- Judah refused to be righteous: The people of Judah are further identified as a people who were lustful, which

would be **wrong desires** (cf. Jeremiah 8:10); they were lying, which would be **wrong declarations** (cf. Jeremiah 8:11); they were licentious, which would be **wrong dispositions** (Jeremiah 8:12). All of these descriptions identify them as a people who refused to be righteous. They were a people who did not respect God's Laws.

- Judah heard the results of their refusals toward God: In Jeremiah 8:13–17 Judah heard the results from their disobedience toward God. They learned they would face doom and desolation:

“Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee . . . For the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink because we have sinned against him. We hoped for peace . . . for a time of healing but there was only terror” (Jeremiah 8:14–15).

When God urged His people to flee to the fortified cities earlier, they did not listen (cf. Jeremiah 4:5–6, 6:17). Finally, as their downfall was coming, they were awakening to the danger, but it was too late for them to do anything about it. The cause for their concern can be seen in Jeremiah 8:16–17:

The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. They have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there. “See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you,” declares the LORD.

Why was Judah just now waking up? There were enemy horses, a rushing army, devouring creatures, and venomous snakes at their northern borders.

Reasons for Judah's Ruin

Jeremiah 8:18–22 gives some reasons for the ruin of the nation of Judah. Jeremiah's heart was broken with the misery of his people. There was no hope that they would change. Notice the cries of the people of Judah and Jeremiah:

*“O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me. Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: ‘Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King no longer there? Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign **idols**?’ The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved. Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?’”* (Jeremiah 8:18–22).

Look under the surface of Judah's cry — they are complaining because God was not taking care of them. They were still blaming God for their problems. Notice how Judah complained, *“The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and **we are not saved**.”* Judah continually tried to blame God for their condition. That was part of the shame for His children.

Judah refused to turn to God, so He had to fulfill His promise of punishment. In the midst of it all, there was the sadness of a prophet in pain: *“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?”* Is there a balm in Gilead? Yes! There is a solution because God's Law was there. God's prophet was there. God's promises were there. And yet the people would not listen.

“Gilead” was a famous place where people went for healing much like modern day pharmacies. Could the people of Judah find a cure? Yes, they could have. They could have gone

to God, but they did not. They could have listened to Jeremiah, but they chose not to hear. There was a solution, but the spirit and attitude of the people were wrong. Jeremiah 8 closes with the cries of patients who would not accept God's care or His cure.

Punishment, Pain, Apostasy, and Promise

Jeremiah 9–11

Introduction

Moving into Jeremiah 9, there are two different themes to be aware of. The core theme is one of punishment. The troubling times that were coming are identified in five different ways:

- Punishment which would impact the prophet and the people (cf. Jeremiah 9:1–2, 7, 9–12, 15–16, 19, 21–22, 25–26). Look over these fourteen verses dealing with the punishment that was coming over the people.
- God’s power and righteousness and the need to know Him were being ignored (cf. Jeremiah 9: 3, 6–7, 9, 13, 15–16, 20, 23, 28). All these verses deal with that theme.
- Man’s wicked ways demanded God’s punishment (cf. Jeremiah 9:2–6, 8, 13–14, 25–26).
- Death or a dirge (cf. Jeremiah 9: 1, 10–11, 16, 20–22)?
- Weeping and Wailing (cf. Jeremiah 9:1, 10, 17–20).

That is one way to look at these chapters, but the following outline is the preferred outline for Jeremiah 9–11.

Punishment, Pain, Apostasy, and Promise

- I. **Apostasy Brings Punishment and Pain** (Jeremiah 9:1–26)

- A. Crying Until There Are No More Tears to Cry (9:1–2)
- B. Carnal to the Core (9:2b–6)
- C. The Aim of God’s Chastisement Is Correction (9:7–11)
- D. Consequences for Carnality (9:17–22)
- E. The Creator’s Counsel (9:23–24)
- F. God’s Chastening Is Consistent (9:25–26)
- II. **God, Idols, and Man** (Jeremiah 10:1–26)
 - A. The Futility of Astrology and Idolatry (10:1–5)
 - B. The Superiority of God (10:6–16)
 - C. God’s Action Against People Who Adhere to Idols (10:17–22)
 - D. A Prophetic Prayer and Plea (10:23–25)
 - E. Deity’s Position Demands Man’s Submission (10:26)
- III. **The Divine Covenant Reviewed and Renewed** (Jeremiah 11:1–23)
 - A. The Covenant Presented to Be Proclaimed (11:1–5)
 - B. The Proclamation: Past and Present Rejection (11:6–10)
 - C. The People’s Plight (11:11–13)
 - D. God’s Perception (11:14–17)
 - E. The Prophet’s Plea (11:20)
 - F. God’s Punishment (11:21–23)

Apostasy Brings Punishment and Pain

Beginning in Jeremiah 9:1–2 Jeremiah can be found crying until he had no more tears to cry. There are two reasons for his tears. He said the tears were flowing “. . . *for the slain of my people.*” There was more going on than people just dying. These people were not just dying. They were going to be “*slain.*”

Some of you may know that I am from the Oklahoma City area where the Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Federal Building occurred on April 19, 1995. One hundred and sixty-eight (168) people were slain in that bombing. The city of Oklahoma City dedicated a memorial to the people who were slain. There are people who survived the blast who had to go through counseling and therapy, trying to overcome the impact that blast had on their lives. Individuals were tormented with flashbacks and nightmares. Memories of the terror they endured on that day have tormented many people for years after the event. That is the kind of torment Jeremiah was going through. He had wept and continued to weep until he had no tears left: “. . . *I would weep day and night for the slain of my people*” (Jeremiah 9:1).

Jeremiah wept not only because his people had been slain, but also because he realized the people were unprepared to die. Knowing that the nation of Judah was not ready to die made their revealed deaths even more difficult for this man of God. Jeremiah’s people were carnal to the core and that added to the struggles he faced. He wanted to leave “. . . *for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people*” (Jeremiah 9:2). In this context the word “*all*” and the word “*every*” should be emphasized as you read through Jeremiah 9:2–6:

*. . . for they are **all** adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people. “They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me . . . Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers. For **every** brother is a deceiver, and **every** friend a slanderer. Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning. You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me,” declares the LORD.*

That was the kind of people who were going to die. Not only did Jeremiah have to deal with the fact that they were going to be slain, he knew these people were not ready to die. They would go from one sin to another without ever acknowledging God. They sinned so much that they had become “*weary . . . with sinning.*” What a horrifying thought knowing that was the kind of people Jeremiah had to work with for at least a portion of his forty-year ministry until the people died or were taken into captivity.

Think about dealing with this kind of situation or circumstance. Think about not being able to trust any brother. These verses are the saddest verses in the Book of Jeremiah. What an ordeal it would be to live with these kinds of conditions. Think about being an elder, a deacon, or a preacher living as Jeremiah had to live. Think about working with other preachers or teachers and not being able to trust any of them. Think about gathering with them week after week, continuing to speak and to serve among them as Jeremiah had to do. That would be a horrifying experience for any man. Those are the conditions in which Jeremiah served. Jeremiah had to face these conditions as well as the horrible tragedy his people were going to face.

Jeremiah 9:7–11 describes the chastisement God was going to use trying to correct His children. God wanted to refine His children: “. . . *‘See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people?’*” (Jeremiah 9:7). The process of refinement needed to be carried out in order to bring impurities to the surface so their iniquities could be cleared away. The corruption that was a part of the conduct of these people caused God to ask, “*Should I not punish them for this? . . . Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?*” (Jeremiah 9:9). What else could He do? He had given them a land flowing with milk and honey, but how sad that now the land was described by Jeremiah as:

. . . desolate and untraveled and the lowing of the cattle is not heard. The birds of the air have fled and the animals are gone. "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals; and I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there" (Jeremiah 9:10–11).

Jeremiah wept and wailed for the mountains and the desert pastures. Such was the painful posture for the prophet of God living among these people. God was the One speaking in verse eleven when He said *"I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins . . . I will lay waste the towns of Judah . . ."* This is the promised punishment He was going to pour out on the people.

Beginning in Jeremiah 9:12–16 there is an explanation for the cause of the confusion among the people. They were being deceived by the messages from the false prophets in the land. The false prophets, the wise men, and the scribes had followed *" . . . the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them"* (Jeremiah 9:14). There is their carnality again. The fathers had left a legacy for their own children that caused their sons to have to eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. Parents need to consider what they are going to leave their children.

The consequences for Judah's carnality were to be death and desolation (cf. Jeremiah 9:17–22). These consequences caused mourning and wailing among the people. Jeremiah 9:19 may have a tinge of satire as Jeremiah recorded what was going to happen to Judah, saying:

This is what the LORD Almighty says: . . . The sound of wailing is heard from Zion: "How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins."

The people were not mourning the death of the people who had died. They were mourning the ruin of their houses. They were

mourning because they were going to be ruined and put to shame. They were selfish and materialistic. They did not even mourn losing their loved ones. It seems that life had become fairly cheap. The expressions used in these verses identify a selfish concern or a materialistic loss that led to the mourning.

There is a song by Johnson Oatman, Jr. which contains the following words: “Not all earth’s gold and silver can make a sinner whole, what shall it profit thee old man if thou should lose thy soul?” This solemn question has only one answer: worldly gain. Gold can be fleeting. Riches compared to an eternal soul are no comparison at all.

God comes on the scene in Jeremiah 9:20. He did not urge them to stop mourning, but He did urge them to redirect that mourning. They did not need to mourn their battered buildings. Instead they needed to mourn the bloated bodies. They did not need to be concerned about their dwelling places. They needed to be concerned about the death of the people themselves. There is a contrast between Jeremiah’s mourning in Jeremiah 9:1–2 and the awful picture of the casual mourning of the people of Judah in these verses.

In Jeremiah 9:23–24 God made a beautiful effort to help the wise men become truly wise. He urged them:

*... “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises **kindness, justice and righteousness** on earth, for in these I delight . . . ”*

This is a fabulous passage from which many sermons have been preached. There is just enough thought to make a person want to study deeper so that he will be able to do right.

Think about the three great kings of Israel beginning with King Saul. What was his real downfall? Not too long after he was appointed king, he began to try to do things his own way

letting his wisdom override what God had told him to do through the prophet Samuel. He began to trust his own wisdom and even offered the burnt offering himself instead of waiting for Samuel. He continued the downward trail even to the point of crying out to the Witch of Endor for direction and guidance. How pitiful! Saul was trusting in his own wisdom (cf. 1 Samuel 13:1–13, 15:7–23, 31:1–6).

King David's downfall came at a time when he wanted to number Israel to find out how powerful and mighty he was as a king. God was angered by what David did and a number of the Israelites died as a result of it. David thought he could operate as a king relying on his might (cf. 2 Samuel 23:8, 24:1–17).

King Solomon was the wealthiest king of his day. His riches became a part of his downfall (cf. 1 Kings 4:21–34, 10:14–19; Ecclesiastes 2:1–12). Solomon also made the mistake of marrying and listening to his foreign wives.

Men need to remember that the best course to follow is to come to know and understand God and His loving kindness along with His justice and His righteousness. Notice that Jeremiah 9:24 shows how the wise can gain God's favor. If man is going to boast, he needs to boast because he understands and knows God, that He is LORD. Man needs to understand the following characteristics of God:

- *“Kindness”* God's loving kindness is God's disposition and a portion of His Spirit. His loving kindness is for man's delight.
- *“Justice”* God's justice is His decrees and His statutes. His justice is man's discipline.
- *“Righteousness”* God's righteousness is His deeds and His service. His righteousness is for man's development. It can be seen in the mighty things done by God.

Knowing and understanding God will bring men delight, discipline, and development. All of these things will truly come to men if they will give God a chance.

“The days are coming . . . when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh . . . For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart” (Jeremiah 9:25–26).

God’s chastening was going to be consistent. He was going to punish His own people even as He punished the nations of Egypt, Edom, Ammon, Moab, and all who lived in the desert in distant places. The problem in every case as is given in this context was that they were all uncircumcised in heart and hence they had to be brought down. Even the house of Israel did not put these things (God’s loving kindness, justice, and righteousness) in their hearts.

God, Idols, and Man

Jeremiah 10:1–5 contains a great expos'e of the futility of idolatry contrasted with the supremacy of Jehovah God. Do not overlook the fact that underneath the futility of idolatry is the need for the vulnerability of man, which God is willing to work through. The futility of idolatry is seen in several expressions that are given:

Hear what the LORD says to you, O house of Israel. This is what the LORD says: “Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch,

their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

Idols must be fastened with nails. There is no stability in an idol. It cannot defend anything. It is like a scarecrow in a cucumber field. This is a fitting image because really an idol cannot scare anyone. It is only mystical and fantasy. It cannot speak or share. It must be carried. It cannot serve man; man must serve the idol. It cannot walk, cannot take a single step. It has no strength. The futility of idolatry is sad. A common phrase in this modern age is "God is dead." This is a philosophy that has become popular.

Newspapers around the country contribute to superstitious outlooks by putting horoscopes and astrology guidelines for men in their pages. How sad it is when people are drawn like this away from God.

The superiority of God is seen in Jeremiah 10:6–16. These verses list seven things that man would not have if it were not for God:

- **Truth** The LORD is "*the true God*" (cf. Psalms 19:7–11; John 17:17).
- **Life** Life itself is from God for He is "*the living God*" (cf. Psalms 100:1–3; John 1:1–4).
- **Time** Time was granted by God for He is "*the everlasting King*" (cf. Psalms 90:1–2, 10:16, 29:10).
- **Authority** The authority for decision making and discipline is through God, "*The nations cannot endure His indignation*" (cf. Psalm 76:7; 2 Chronicles 20:6).
- **Creator** God is the creator. It is He who made the earth by His power: "*By the word of the LORD were the heavens made . . . For he*

spoke, and it came to be . . .” (cf. Genesis 1; Psalm 33:6–9).

- **Wisdom** It is God who gives wisdom. He established the world by His wisdom (cf. Proverbs 8; James 1:5).
- **Word** God has given the Word to direct man. With His powerful Word His “*. . . voice breaks the cedars . . .*” The waters, clouds, lightning, and wind all respond and obey His voice (cf. Psalms 29:3–11; 135:7).

It is important to realize how many things man is dependent upon because of God. A sceptic might say that he has not seen God. The skeptic may respond, “He hasn’t said anything to me.” Sceptics do not look to the Bible for their guide. There is the problem many people have. They take the course they want to take. What is the explanation for the list of the things mentioned above? What man or even group of men created the earth? Who supplies the air that man breathes? Men do not know how to create these things. Whose powerful hand controls the gravity that keeps man glued to this earth? Whose hand is it that keeps man from flying off into space without a spaceship to protect him or a tracking station to direct him? Who keeps the sun, moon, stars, and planets from crashing into each other? Colossians 1:15–17 says:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **For by him** all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and **in him all things hold together.***

All things exist and are held together by God. Man cannot do it. Invariably the people who would be skeptical of the Bible being God’s Book and bowing before God are the ones who

make a god of themselves. Think about the best men with the greatest brains. They could not do the things God has done. There is no explanation for these things unless one attributes them to Jehovah God. The Bible is God's living Word and no man could have done it as beautifully.

Jeremiah 10:17–22 expresses God's action against people who adhere to following the idols that cannot act. God will act! God through Jeremiah resorted to using figures of speech that describe people who have fallen sick and have the need for a cure. They are stubborn and will not repent. This type of people are described as sheep who have been scattered:

The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered. Listen! The report is coming — a great commotion from the land of the north! It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals (Jeremiah 10:21–22).

The punishment is coming. The scattered sheep will be involved with a force coming from the north that will leave the land desolate and a place for the jackals. In the midst of all the shaking, crashing, and clashing might, there is a sordid picture of the punishment that is going to come upon the nation of Judah. They are going to be punished because little gods got into their hearts rather than the Great God who longed to bless and care for them.

Notice that Jeremiah 10:23–25 is a prophetic prayer and plea to these people. Jeremiah prayed for God to “*Correct me . . . but only with justice — not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing*” (Jeremiah 10:22). The national judgment of God was coming upon the people. Jeremiah, who was in the midst of the nation, automatically did a little self-examination. It is an appropriate action for man to examine himself as to whether he is “*in the faith*” (2 Corinthians 13:5) in view of the greatness of God as He is portrayed in this chapter. Jeremiah

asked God to correct him with justice. He humbled himself before God. The whole nation of Judah needed to do the same thing. Judah did not follow Jeremiah's example. They did not even respond.

Jeremiah said, *"I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps"* (Jeremiah 10:23). This verse maybe one of the most often quoted passages in the entire Book of Jeremiah. It is a jewel of truth that this chapter so well identifies moving from God to idolatry. Man vulnerably kept going to the idols instead of going to Jehovah God. The idols could not help man and man did not know how to direct his own steps. This echoes the need for man to look to God.

A summation in regard to why **God's position demands man's submission** would include the following five reasons:

- Man is not able to direct his own steps. *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"* (cf. Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12). Man does not know how to direct his steps without God's help.
- Man cannot correct his own wrongs by himself. Man needs God to be part of his correction process. He needs to take the steps that God gives to be able to gain forgiveness. Men are to forgive one another: *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you"* (Ephesians 4:32, cf. Jeremiah 10:24; Ephesians 2:1–9). Consider the song "Without Him" by Mylon R. LeFevre:

Without Him I could do nothing; Without
Him I'd surely fail. Without Him I would be
drifting, Like a ship without a sail. Without
Him I would be dying; Without Him I'd be
enslaved. Without Him life would be

hopeless, But with Jesus, thank God I'm saved.¹⁹

The picture is one of man's salvation and man's need to submit unto God.

- Man can be reduced to nothing by God. That is the awful agony expressed by Jeremiah in Jeremiah 10:24 (cf. Hebrews 12:28f; Matthew 10:28).
- Man needs God to help him overcome evil men. Man cannot correct society or their needs without God's help (cf. Jeremiah 10:25; 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9; Genesis 5:26; 1 Samuel 12:10–11; Psalms 14:2–4 31:15; 59:1–17; 71:4; 140:1–13; 2 Timothy 4:17–18; Hebrews 13:5–6).
- God can bring great good to man. This reason may not be found in this Jeremiah context, but it may be the best reason of all for man to submit to God. Just as God can reduce man to nothing, the beautiful fact is that because He loves man, God wants to bring all that is good and perfect to man:

Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:16–18).

The Divine Covenant Reviewed and Renewed

Once again God tried to bring His covenant back to His people. Jeremiah was told by the LORD to listen to and

¹⁹ LeFevre, Mylon R. (W. 1963): #544 Songs of Faith and Praise, Howard Publishing Co. Inc. West Monroe, LA, 1994).

proclaim His words (cf. Jeremiah 11:2). Both facets of the covenant were to be presented, the curse and the blessing. This likely related to the reformation efforts by King Josiah when the words of the Book of the Covenant were read. Consider the reaction of all the people:

*Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets — all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD — to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then **all the people pledged themselves** to the covenant (2 Kings 23:1–3).*

All the people stood when Josiah read the covenant. Notice that the King called all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem and all the people, great and small, to hear all the words of this covenant. They were to walk after the commandments and statutes and judgments with all their heart and soul. That was the way the covenant was given to God's children so that they could obey it and declare it to others. The past rejection of the covenant is covered in Jeremiah 11:6–10. The nation of Judah had consistently refused to obey:

“From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, ‘Obey me.’ But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses

of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep.” (Jeremiah 11:7–8).

Judah’s plight because of their rebellion and rejection was going to be disaster and desolation. God’s perception of their rebellion can be seen in Jeremiah 11:14–17 followed by Jeremiah’s plea in Jeremiah 11:18–20. Jeremiah pleaded for the people to turn again and recognize their wrong deeds. He pleaded with them to do as God had directed them. God revealed to Jeremiah the fact that the people were going to plot to kill him. God promised to take care of Jeremiah’s situation telling him their young military men would fall by the sword and the young children would die of famine. These people were going to be punished and God’s punishment upon them was revealed as disaster brought to the men of Anathoth.

It is interesting in light of all of this that Jeremiah seemed to want to speed things up. One side trusted in God, but the other part of him wanted God to act quickly. Jeremiah called upon God in Jeremiah 12:1–4 and then God answered him. God did not really deal with what Jeremiah wanted Him to do, but He did cover what Jeremiah needed. God responded to Jeremiah and the people warning them of the destruction to come. Even in this warning there was a ray of hope given with some conditional promises.

The Prophet, the People, and the Covenant

Jeremiah 12–14

Introduction

Remember that in Jeremiah 11 God warned His prophet that the people wanted to kill him so they could blot not only him out, but also any memory of him. Jeremiah 12 is the prophet's reaction to this revelation from God. This chapter in the study of the Book of Jeremiah will highlight some of the responses and reactions. Jeremiah was concerned because the people of Judah were prospering. They were succeeding, achieving, and being spared in order to continue.

The Prophet, the People, and the Covenant

- I. **The Problem of Unrighteous Prospering** (Jeremiah 12)
 - A. The Prophet's Question (12:1–4)
 - B. God's Response to His Prophet (12:5–6)
 - C. God's Response to His Own People (12:7–13)
 - D. God's Conditional Promises (12:14–17)
- II. **The Painful Price to Be Paid for Pride** (Jeremiah 13)
 - A. The Parable of the Dirty Girdle (13:1–11)
 - B. Drunkenness Identified Arrogance (13:12–14)
 - C. Darkness Will Surround Their Haughty Heads (13:15–17)
 - D. Dishonor Faced by Royalty (13:18–19)
 - E. Disgrace Drapes Over the Land (13:20–27)

- III. **Drought, Deception, and Demands** (Jeremiah 14)
- A. The Results of the Drought (14:1–6)
 - B. Reaction of the People (14:7–9)
 - C. The Reaction of God (14:10–12)
 - D. Reaction to False Prophets (14:13–16)
 - E. Remorse for the Rewards of Rebellion (14:17–18)
 - F. Response by Judah to God (14:19–22)

The Problem of the Unrighteous Prospering

Jeremiah called upon God to give Him some directions and guidelines because he saw an environment in which the wicked politicians were being reelected. He saw evil neighbors who had the best crop in the community. He saw the false teacher whose flock seemed to be continually increasing. In today's terminology, he saw the false preacher whose congregation was growing. He saw the gang leader whose gang was making money on drugs. The perplexity in Jeremiah's mind was why was this happening? He asked God why these evils were allowed to prosper even though they wanted to kill him? Jeremiah acknowledged that God was certainly capable, but he wanted to give God a little bit of help and direction. He had questions for God:

*You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: **Why** does the way of the wicked prosper? **Why** do all the faithless live at ease? You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts. Yet you know me, O LORD; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter! **How long** will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have*

perished. Moreover, the people are saying, "He will not see what happens to us" (Jeremiah 12:1–4).

Jeremiah complained about the treachery of the people. They lived a life of ease, they had taken root and produced fruit, but their hearts were far from God. So Jeremiah urged God to drag them off like sheep to be slaughtered. Jeremiah wanted God to do something about these people. One of the reasons Jeremiah was responding like this to God was because the people were saying that he would not see what was going to happen to them. They were saying they would still be around even after Jeremiah was dead and gone. This was troublesome to the prophet. Notice that even in this questioning attitude, Jeremiah was committing the people to God. He believed that God could take care of His children, but he wanted God to do it immediately. How many people wonder if God is aware of their own situation?

In Jeremiah 12:5–6 God responded to the prophet without specifically giving him an answer. God delayed punishment as Jeremiah measured it, but God did unveil some of the circumstances to Jeremiah. That caused him to forget himself and to get back on track with what he needed to do, facing up to what was going to happen to the people. God pointed out that if Jeremiah was tired of the foot race, then what was he going to do when he had to compete with the horses. The message for Jeremiah was that if he was struggling with the false prophets and their teachings, then how was he going to compete with the horses and chariots and the army coming out of Babylon to conquer the land? God was telling Jeremiah that the real battle had not even started yet and he was already giving up. What was he going to do when the land was under siege and had been made desolate?

God used another figure of speech to refer to the time of peace referring to the present because the war had not yet started. Jeremiah was having a hard time in the “. . . *safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the*

Jordan?”(Jeremiah 12:5). How was Jeremiah going to handle a time when he has to run in the thickets near the Jordan? These verses refer to a time when the Jordan River would rise and the animals would be flushed out of the regions where they had been hiding and they would invariably go out to harm men. They would carry off the cattle and the whole land was going to become a waste land. This was going to be a tempestuous time and a time when danger would be intensified. God was telling Jeremiah that it was peaceful now, so what would he do when the battle really began? Jeremiah needed to direct his attention to the coming problems as a way to rise above his current concerns. God called Jeremiah’s attention to another burden before him. His brothers and those of his own household had betrayed him. Jeremiah needed to deal with the separation from his own family.

Beginning in Jeremiah 12:7–13 notice God’s response to His people. In reality this response was a way to help Jeremiah deal with the people as God informed the prophet not only of what God was going to do, but also what Jeremiah himself was going to have to do by abandoning his own people, *“I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies”* (Jeremiah 12:7). The word *“abandon”* identifies the intensity of God’s own battle for His people. This word means to pluck up, to expel nations from a land, to be overthrown, to be dried up as if the water was taken away. God told Jeremiah that was what He was going to do to His own children. Jeremiah was going to have to face the same kind of struggle and do the same thing.

Beginning in Jeremiah 12:8 God gave Jeremiah three reasons why He was going to abandon His own children:

- *“My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me: therefore I hate her”* (Jeremiah 12:8). The children of God were acting like a roaring lion out of control against God. People do not become friends or have

a close fellowship with a roaring lion. God was saying I can no longer work with My people.

- “*Has not my inheritance become to me like a speckled bird of prey that other birds of prey surround and attack?*” (Jeremiah 12:9). God identified His children as a “*speckled bird of prey*.” I like Theo Laetsch’s way of covering this. What is the idea of the “*speckled bird of prey*”?

A gaudily colored bird of prey appears in a flock of other birds of prey, which attack him, displume and mutilate him. Those nations with which the highly favored and beautified Jewish nation mingled against God’s will, shall now pluck it to pieces. From near and far the enemies come. God Himself calls them and all the beasts of the field to join in the kill.²⁰

Enemy forces were going to come upon the nation of Judah and they would pick the people apart.

- “*Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland*” (Jeremiah 12:10). Many nations were going to be involved in the attacks against Judah: Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, Assyrians, Egyptians, and the Babylonians will all come like shepherds. They would camp in the land, conquer, and consume the whole country side. God’s fertile field was going to be turned into a desolate wilderness.

²⁰ Laetsch, Theo., Bible Commentary, Jeremiah, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, Missouri, 1965, p. 133–134.

God was telling Jeremiah what He was going to face with His own children and Jeremiah was going to have to face it as well.

In Jeremiah 12:14–17 there is a little ray of hope for the nation given in two negatives and two positives. First God said: *“As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people, Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them”* (Jeremiah 12:14). This would be a negative for the enemy nations because they were going to fall, but it would also be a blessing for God’s people. God was going to separate the nation of Judah from their *“wicked neighbors.”*

In Jeremiah 12:15 God enlarged this positive promise of hope further when He said: *“But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country.”* God promised to return His children to their inherited land. In Jeremiah 12:16–17 God spoke about another positive factor for His people concerning the nations around them. He said:

“And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, ‘As surely as the LORD lives’ — even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal — then they will be established among my people. But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it . . .”

If the nations around Judah learned God’s ways and swore by His name, He would receive those mixed nations — *“... they will be established among my people.”* This is another example identifying God’s interest in all nations. He was not just interested in the nation of Judah.

God’s final negative threat applied not only to the nations around Judah but to Judah as well — if *“any nation”* did not listen and obey, God said He would *“... completely uproot and destroy it.”*

That is the completion of Jeremiah 12. Look back carefully and notice that one thing shines through: Jeremiah received a very complete answer in regard to how God was going to respond to his complaints:

*“Yet I would speak with you about your justice: **Why** does the way of the wicked prosper? **Why** do all the faithless live at ease? . . . **How long** will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered?”*

God’s answer was complete concerning His justice — “**I** will treat My own people as **I** must treat them. **I** will forsake them. Jeremiah, **you** must understand the situation and prepare for what is ahead for **you**.”

The Painful Price to Be Paid for Pride

Beginning in Jeremiah 13 God presented an attack against what was a core problem in Judah, their pompous pride. They had haughty heads and arrogant attitudes. That was the core cause of their troubles. God was going to react against that. Notice the way God covered the deterioration that pride had caused in Jeremiah 13:1–11. Their haughtiness and pride are the central thought all the way through this thirteenth chapter. It is a great lesson.

Notice the interesting way in which God conveyed this lesson in the parable of the dirty girdle. Some of the phrasing in this parable may seem strange. Some have said this must have been a dream or a vision, perhaps a symbol story that never could have happened. If a person looks at this parable in that way, he will overlook the context. This parable is one of the most beautiful and ingenious lessons God ever gave in the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. There are ten points to be seen in this parable.

The Parable of the Dirty Girdle

This is what the LORD said to me: “Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not let it touch water.” So I bought a belt, as the LORD directed, and put it around my waist. Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time: “Take the belt you bought and are wearing around your waist, and go now to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks.” So I went and hid it at Perath, as the LORD told me. Many days later the LORD said to me, “Go now to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there.” So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless. Then the word of the LORD came to me: “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt — completely useless! For as a belt is bound around a man’s waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me,’ declares the LORD, ‘to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened’” (Jeremiah 13:1–11).

The linen girdle or belt was a symbol of private ownership during the time of Jeremiah. People would not walk up to someone and ask if they could borrow their linen belt. It was not community property; a linen belt belonged to only one person. Notice what God said in Jeremiah 13:11:

“For as a belt is bound around a man’s waist, so I bound the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to me . . . to be my people for my renown and praise and honor. But they have not listened.”

God made the household of Israel and the household of Judah that they might be **for Him, My people**. Remember first that the linen belt denoted **private ownership**: *“I bound the whole house . . . to be my people for my renown and praise and honor.”*

Second, the belt was a symbol of **closeness**. A girdle or belt clings to the person who wears it. God wanted His people to cling to Him. Third, the girdle was also a symbol of splendor and **sophistication**. It was worn on special occasions. God intended for His people to be a special people, *“for my renown and praise and honor.”* Notice that these three symbols denote a relationship between God and His people.

Fourth, the girdle as it was defined in this drama turned from something of splendor into something of shame. The special people had become evil: *“. . . but now it was ruined and completely useless”* (Jeremiah 13:7). The belt had become totally worthless. Notice the ideas of pride in Jeremiah 13:9, 15, and 17. Wearing the girdle had become a very itchy and irritating thing, but remember God had said not to take it off or let it touch any water. Sooner or later a person would get tired of wearing something itchy just as a person would become tired of that kind of relationship. God had to recognize the pride of these people to the point that He would be willing to turn from them.

Fifth, it was time to **discard** the belt which had become worthless (cf. Jeremiah 13:4–7). God knew what He had to do because the girdle had deteriorated to such a degree that it was worthless and needed to be cast away. Remember that was what the children of God had become, worthless to Him. Sixth, the linen girdle was to be taken to *“Perath,”* which was probably the Euphrates River in Babylon, and **hidden** there. Babylon was the very place where God’s people were going to be taken into captivity (cf. Jeremiah 13:4–7).

Seventh, taking the girdle to Babylon meant bearing it the distance of approximately 250–400 miles according to the tribal route one might follow. Such is one of the follies of this drama.

It made no sense to bury the belt in the Euphrates, why not bury it in Judah? The fact that God's people were going to be in **captivity in the land of Babylon** could be part of the answer. Could this be a chance for Jeremiah, God's prophet, to meet King Nebuchadnezzar? There is no record that this happened, but it is recorded in Jeremiah 39 that when Nebuchadnezzar came down and conquered the land, in the final stages he gave specific instructions about how to treat Jeremiah. This could mean that the king had become acquainted with him and appreciated the prophet (cf. Jeremiah 39: 11–14; 29:1–7).

Eighth, another reason for Jeremiah to go to the Euphrates in addition to meeting King Nebuchadnezzar might have been for his **protection**. In Jeremiah 11:18–21 God revealed the plot from the people of Anathoth against the prophet. His life was in danger, so perhaps it was at this time that Jeremiah needed to get away.

Ninth, it is also possible that Jeremiah needed the time to get away to do some **meditation**, getting his mind focused. He needed to decide what he was going to do about his own family and their treacherous dealings with him (cf. Jeremiah 12:6). He had to be able to grasp all that God had given him in regard to his behavior in the midst of these circumstances (cf. Jeremiah 11:18–12:17). God was possibly sending Jeremiah away to **prepare him** for the harder times to come (cf. Jeremiah 12:5–13).

And finally tenth, the journey God called for Jeremiah to make with the linen girdle was surely a factor in Jeremiah **accepting** the total destruction of the nation of Judah and what they would be facing.

The linen girdle or belt had become totally worthless. God was going to forsake His house, abandon His inheritance, and give His children into the hands of her enemies (cf. Jeremiah 12:7–8). Jeremiah needed to be able to move in that direction. One part of love is hate. When a person loves deeply, he hates even more those forces that cause the deterioration and breakdown of the people he loves. That is the picture of the

prophet as he struggled to accept what was going to happen to his people. This is a really beautiful lesson when looked at in this light.

Beginning in Jeremiah 13:12–14 there is the picture of the drunken state of the nation of Judah as they reel to and fro staggering like a skid row bum. God was actually describing the condition of His children as He called upon them to fill the wineskins with wine. God was using this figure of speech telling them that they were going to be a people who were totally out of focus, befuddled and dazed like a drunken man when the armies from the North came down and attacked them. God was trying to wake up the people. They needed to prepare for what was coming.

Notice in Jeremiah 13:15–17 darkness is the symbol that is going to settle over the land. If you have ever been in absolute total darkness especially in the mountains where there might be a ravine on one side or a rock to run into, it can be a horrifying experience. God was trying to help His people see that they were reeling to and fro. And then put darkness into that drunken scene and it is a horrible picture of what will happen to the people when the downfall and the doom and desolation actually occurs. The nation of Judah was haughty and arrogant. Those attitudes needed to be rooted out because they thought they were secure and did not have a problem.

God tried to identify this problem in another way in Jeremiah 13:18–19 talking to them about the king and queen. When a peon or peasant dies or falls, no one pays attention, there are no headlines. When a king or queen goes down as is described in these verses, “*Come down from your thrones, for your glorious crowns will fall from your heads,*” then the empire is on its way out. The nation of Judah was going to fall. All of this probably referred to the time coming when Jehoiachin and his mother, Nehushta, were carried into Babylonian captivity in approximately 597 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 24:8, 15; Jeremiah 22:24–30). These verses were just another attempt from God to wake up His people.

Disgrace was draped over the land (cf. Jeremiah 13:20–27). This passage of scripture identifies why this was going to happen and the fact that the force was going to come in from the north. At that time their haughtiness and pride might cause them to say we will get help from the other nations, but the LORD is going to set their “*special allies*” to become rulers over them. Judah had cultivated nations around them to become friends, but God was going to set them over His children. The Hebrew phrase for “head over” can also be translated as “poison.” What was Judah going to do when those they had befriended as part of their security became their masters or even their poison? What would they do? This is yet another attempt to wake up these people to the fact that Zion was going to be removed and she would be forced to walk barefoot into captivity.

Then God asked the question: “*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots?*” (Jeremiah 13:23). This is not a Calvinistic doctrine that is teaching that these people were lost and there was nothing they could do. This is not teaching that they had been lost simply because God made them lost. That is not what this is talking about. This principle is the same as the one seen in Hebrew 6:1–6. People do reach a point when they keep rebelling so that they will never come back to God. God was still trying to wake Judah up and warn them that they could not pursue the course they were on.

Thus there come the downfall and the cry at the close of this chapter, “*How long will you be unclean?*” (Jeremiah 13:27). Tragically this generation would remain unclean until they were gone.

Drought, Deception, and Demands

This question of “*How long will you be unclean?*” brings to mind the ten ways God tried to call Judah to repentance. In

Jeremiah 14 a drought came upon Judah which did have an effect upon the people. It led them to confess their sins. There is a great message in this chapter. Notice in Jeremiah 14:3 the nobles sent their servants out for water and none could be found. It is a terrible picture. Think about the children without any water. The ground was cracked open. The deer, who is a symbol of affection with the young, will abandon her newborn fawn. Hard times are presented in these verses.

Beginning in Jeremiah 14:7–9 the people began to do what God had hoped the drought would do, bringing the nation of Judah back to Him. It did affect them to a point; there were three stages involved. First, they did confess their sins: *“Although our sins testify against us . . . For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you”* (Jeremiah 14:7). This verse makes it sound like the people were on track to start doing better, but notice there is not a specific sin listed in this. They just said they had sinned. Look in Jeremiah 5:1–9. God was always specific when He talked to His people about their sins: they swore falsely, they swore by those who were not God, they committed adultery, they thronged the houses of harlots, they lied about the LORD. That is the way God has always talked to His children.

Think about the way most churches function today. When they sing the invitation song and someone comes forward, he can check a card to be baptized or check a card to confess his sins. Sometimes that is as specific as the confession ever gets. It is very easy for Christians not to really correct their lives if they can just confess that they have sinned. That is exactly what happened to the nation of Judah.

Then notice in Jeremiah 14:7–9 the people were praising God:

*“ . . . O LORD, do something for the sake of your name
 . . . O Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress .
 . . You are among us, O LORD, and we bear your
 name . . . ”*

It sounds like they were praising God and confessing their sins, but they never did really correct their lives.

And finally the peoples' prayers show their humanist trends because they told God what to do:

“Why are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who stays only a night? Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? . . . do not forsake us!”

Surely God felt like responding, “Who is forsaking whom?” The people of God had worshiped pagan gods for so long that they had turned God into a cosmic Santa Claus or giver of gifts. For so long they had reached up to tug on His coat tail when they wanted something. Isn't that what pagan gods were for? They gave fertility, fruit, prosperity, and protection. These people wanted to tell God it was His time to do something about their circumstances.

There are a few lessons to be learned from these verses for someone who has the need to correct his life:

- Confessing that he has sinned but not genuinely repenting will not work before God.
- Blaming others as Judah tried to blame God does not correct the sin.
- Telling others what they need to do to make it right as Judah tried to tell God what to do does not take the place of doing what is right.
- Creating self-pity when he must pay for his sins can be like running from God's principle that man will reap what he sows. It is like trying to put on a covering and not really changing. Thus he fails Jehovah God.

The drought in Judah did not cause the people to correct their sins. It is important to be careful when man tries to arrange things before God.

Punishment and Protection

Jeremiah 15–17

Introduction

In Jeremiah 14 Judah suffered through a great drought that caused an attitude to surface on the part of the people so that they praised God and make good comments about God, but then they tried to tell God what to do. The drought caused the true nature of the people to surface. God warned them about what was coming in different ways. He used the example of the jug or wineskins being filled with wine and identified this with a drunken man in a stupor reeling to and fro. When the conflict comes for Judah, they will be befuddled and dazed like a drunken man. Or when darkness comes, God used the illustration of one being horrified in the darkness unable to find his way. God mentioned the King and the Queen mother being taken into captivity. All of these examples were used to try to help the people see that they needed to do more than just confess with their lips their sins. They needed to correct their lives.

In the Jeremiah 14:20 the nation of Judah has not changed. First they acknowledged their wickedness, which sounded good, but in Jeremiah 14:21 they began to give God directions again telling Him not to despise them or to disgrace His throne. They even told Him to “*Remember your covenant with us and do not break it.*” They added that they were the ones waiting on God: “*Therefore we will wait upon thee: for thou hast made all these things*” (Jeremiah 14:22, KJV). They were trying to tell

God that it was His time to act. The nature of these people had not changed at all.

Punishment and Protection

- I. **Punishment and Protection Promised and Predicted** (Jeremiah 15)
 - A. Punishment Promised to These People (Jeremiah 15:1–14)
 - B. Protection Promised for God's Prophet (Jeremiah 15–21)
- II. **Horrors and Hope** (Jeremiah 16)
 - A. Prohibition of Marriage (Jeremiah 16:1–4)
 - B. Prohibition of Mourning (Jeremiah 16:5–7)
 - C. Prohibition Against Celebrating (Jeremiah 16:8–9)
 - D. Denials by the Doomed and Definiteness by the Divine (Jeremiah 16:10–13)
 - E. Hope and Hurt Are Ahead (Jeremiah 16:14–21)
- III. **The Heart and Hearing of Man Viewed by God** (Jeremiah 17)
 - A. Hearts Engraved with Sin (17: 1–4)
 - B. Hearts Turning Away or Turning to God (17:5–8)
 - C. God Will Search Our Hearts (17:9–14)
 - D. What Jeremiah Hears From Judah (17:15–18)
 - E. What God Wants Judah to Hear and Heed (17:19–22)
 - F. How Judah Heard and the Consequences (17:23–27)

Punishment and Protection Promised and Predicted

Jeremiah 15 begins with a consciousness that God was going to declare His punishment upon the nation of Judah. And yet He also promised to protect Jeremiah. Notice in Jeremiah 15:1–2 God separated Himself from His own children:

Then the LORD said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go! And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, 'This is what the LORD says: "Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity."'"

The key verse for the entire chapter of Jeremiah 15 is verse seven. God explained the reason He was going to send these people away from His presence, "**. . . They have not changed their ways.**"

The place where God was going to send His disobedient children is very sobering. He used the expressions: "*Those destined for death to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation . . . those for captivity . . .*" Some would have no provisions, others would have no place to live, others would have no pulse, others no peace. Which would you pick? God said these were the things that were going to happen to the people. He enlarged on the destructive forces even further in Jeremiah 15:3 when He said that after the sword had killed them, they would be dragged away by dogs and birds would come to feed on their flesh. The beasts of the earth were going to devour and destroy. There would be no one in the land to bury the bodies. These were the awful circumstances confronting the nation of Judah.

In Jeremiah 15:10 Jeremiah responded with what this was doing to him; he was concerned about the circumstances to come:

"Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth, a man with whom the whole land strives and contends! I have neither lent nor borrowed, yet everyone curses me."

Look at this verse in the context of all that was happening around Jeremiah and all that the people were saying to him. He was very near the point of giving in and giving over to the people around him. He was so weary that he was ready to give up. In Jeremiah 15:19 God even urged Jeremiah not to give in to these people telling him “. . . *you must not turn to them.*” The circumstances confronting the people and Jeremiah were horrible, but God assured Jeremiah He was going to protect him:

“Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress” (Jeremiah 15:11).

This protection actually did take place at various times during Jeremiah’s ministry (cf. Jeremiah 21:1–2, 37:3, 17; 38:14). The enemies of Jeremiah did come to him even though they did not ever change their ways. In reality they kept retaliating against him even when they came to him. The ordeals he was going through at this point in his ministry caused him to cry out to the LORD:

You understand, O LORD; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering — do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake. When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty. I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? (Jeremiah 15:15–18).

Jeremiah wanted God to remember him and take notice of his persecutors. He wanted God to recognize his respect for the revealed Word of God. Jeremiah did not join with the merry makers who were mocking God. He tried to do the right thing and he wanted God to take notice and react against these people.

In reality God did react favorably to Jeremiah. Jeremiah 15 contains the prophet's plea and his perplexity, but there is also God's promise of protection in Jeremiah 15:19–21:

“If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them. I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you . . . I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.”

Even with the promise of protection, there were three things Jeremiah had to do. Instead of embracing him with a token of love and saying nice gentle things to the prophet, God said:

- **Return to Me.** God said, *“If you repent, I will restore you . . .”* (Jeremiah 15:19). God recognized that Jeremiah was drifting toward the thinking of the people.
- **Stand before Me.** God said, *“ . . . thou shalt stand before me . . .”* (Jeremiah 15:19, KJV). The NIV translated this phrase *“ . . . that you may serve me . . .”* The word “stand” is *amad* in the Hebrew. It means to be set firmly, to sustain, to endure, to stand up. It is a strong term. That was what God wanted Jeremiah to do. He needed to stand firm before God without wavering like the nation of Judah was doing. He could not pretend nor could he live by pity.

- **Speak for Me.** God said, “. . . *You will be my spokesman*” (Jeremiah 15:19).

After God told Jeremiah what He wanted him to do, God gave him three precious promises:

- “*I will restore you . . .*” This meant Jeremiah had to come forward.
- “*I will make you to this people, a fortified wall of bronze . . .*” This is the same promise God gave Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:18, but he had to work with and for God.
- “*I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel.*” There were going to be strong forces working against Jeremiah, but God said I will take care of you.

Jeremiah needed to realize that God would care for him just as Christians need to realize His care today. I like the words of G. Campbell Morgan in his book, Studies of the Prophecy of Jeremiah.

His love in time past forbids us to think
He will leave us at last in trouble to sink.
Each sweet Ebenezer we have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to carry us through.²¹

Horror and Hope

Jeremiah 16 does not seem to have any encouragement for God’s prophet because it begins with even more negative instructions for Jeremiah from God. In Jeremiah 16:1–4 God told Jeremiah not to marry or have any sons or daughters. God

²¹ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies of the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan New Jersey, 1969, p. 94.

also told Jeremiah not to enter into a house of mourning or a house where there was feasting or merriment going on.

How difficult all of this must have been for Jeremiah. Jeremiah was obviously lonely (cf. Jeremiah 15:17) and companionship would have been so precious to him. It would have been natural for one of his age to marry, but God told him not to participate in these things. God did not want Jeremiah to present a hypocritical message by taking a wife or raising a family when he was preaching about the desolation and destruction that were coming. Who would want to have a wife or bring children into that kind of situation if one loved God and understood the nature of the punishment that was coming? With that in mind, God told the prophet not to do these things for his own good.

What kind of comfort could Jeremiah offer those who were mourning when he had just covered the fact that God was going to send His people away from His presence? God had said: *“Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity”* (Jeremiah 15:2) and called on Jeremiah to proclaim that message.

What encouragement could Jeremiah offer? There was none for God’s people. There was no reason to feast and rejoice. God was going to remove the place of merrymaking and joy. The prophet would have been a hypocrite to participate with the bride and bridegroom in their merrymaking. God denied all of these activities from Jeremiah.

Beginning in Jeremiah 16:10–13, the doomed people themselves denied the definite plans of God. They had repeatedly gone the way of the wicked. God had not in any way altered His plans and yet these people continued to deny God’s prophecies concerning what was going to happen to them. They continued to believe that God’s plans would not come for them.

Not many people have the chance to know what is going to happen when they speak before they actually speak. Notice

in Jeremiah 16:10–13 that Jeremiah knew what was going to happen before he spoke because God revealed it to him:

“When you tell these people all this and they ask you, ‘Why has the LORD decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the LORD our God?’ then say to them, ‘It is because your fathers forsook me,’ declares the LORD, ‘and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law. But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me. So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’”

God told Jeremiah that when he spoke to the people about their iniquities, sin, and the punishment they were going to receive, they were going to react against him. God through Jeremiah made the following charges against the nation of Judah:

- *“... your fathers forsook me ...”*
- *“... your fathers ... followed other gods*
- *“... your fathers ... served [other gods ...]”*
- *“... your fathers ... worshiped them [other gods]”*
- *“... your fathers forsook me and did not keep my law.”*

That was what the forefathers of Judah had done. God charged Judah with the same things, but He continued with the following charge, telling them they had gone one step further:

- *“You have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me.”*

Jeremiah pronounced the doom that was coming for the nation of Judah. They in turn responded without respect for God in their stubbornness. There are three levels of obedience/disobedience:

- Obey God (This is the right way).
- Obey other gods.
- Obey the imagination of one's own heart.

God declared that His own people had dropped to the lowest level possible. They had totally turned away from Him. For that reason, God told the people He was going to “*throw/hurl*” them out of the land into a land they had never known. They were going to worship other gods day and night. Perhaps God was saying, “If you want those other gods so badly, I will make sure that you never get away from them.” Foreign gods would one day surround them.

God said He was not going to show His people any “*favor*.” If God is the giver of “*every good and perfect gift*” (James 1:17) and He removed all “*favor*” — then what is left for man? That was going to be the punishment for the nation of Judah.

In Jeremiah 16:14–21 there is a measure of hope intermingled with hurt. The hope is presented when God promised a return for His children, but He also identified the hurt telling them this present generation was going to be punished. There was going to be an international attack upon idolatry.

God was saying these things not to help these people because He knew they were not going to change. God was saying these things for the prophet. Jeremiah was beginning to perceive that the deportation itself was a part of the plan of God that was necessary for cleansing this nation. He saw in God's plan that the move that had been originally made from Egypt into Canaan had been a move **into idolatry**. The move from Babylon back into Canaan would be a move **away from**

idolatry. God said He was going to “. . . *restore them to the land I gave their forefathers*” (Jeremiah 16:15). A move away from idolatry would also be a cleansing for the nation that would involve a move toward God.

Jeremiah seems to grasp the stages that the nation of Judah had gone through. He declared that God was his strength to be able to speak, his stronghold to be able to continue his service, and his refuge for his own security. He had not grasped everything, but he was finally getting closer to realizing all that was going to come. He saw that there was going to be a reformation. Jeremiah finally realized that restoration would follow the deportation of the nation of Judah, “. . . *to you [God] the nations will come from the ends of the earth . . .*” This statement is a messianic prophecy. Later in Jeremiah 23:3–8 there is another statement that is also messianic. In these verses God was giving Jeremiah some encouragement for the tomorrows that were coming.

The Heart and Hearing of Man as Viewed by God

Jeremiah 17 reverts back to the situation in Judah at their present time. Notice that God said their hearts were engraved with sin, “*Judah’s sin is engraved . . . on the tablets of their hearts . . .*” (Jeremiah 17:1). If there is one central message in Jeremiah 17 it deals with the word “*heart*.” The problem for this generation in Judah was that a heart engraved with sin meant the sin was easily identified. It was an obvious sin for all to see. God also mentioned that the heart that they should have had for their children, which refers to the deepest love anyone would likely have, was in reality a heart devoted to idolatry. That is how deeply their hearts had become enslaved with the sin of idolatry.

Jeremiah 17:5–8 contains one of the most beautiful expressions in regard to the dangers of hearts turning away

from God and the comparison of hearts turning to God. The LORD said:

*“**Cursed is the one** who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and **whose heart turns away from the LORD**. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But **blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD**, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”*

Remember the curses that God said would come upon the nations for their disobedience in Deuteronomy 28–30. Those verses also contained a list of blessings for those who obeyed the LORD and followed His commands. This list of curses and blessings is a parallel to that context.

God added that the one who turns to man for his strength will be like a bush in the desert which cannot survive. Apart from God man is nothing. Apart from God a person will not see any prosperity. A person who should be able to see clearly will be in darkness:

At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you (Deuteronomy 28:29).

The pattern is such that one cannot discern between good and evil. The situation becomes horrifying when one's heart turns away from God. It will also be as one who lives in the wastelands of the wilderness or in a land of salt where there can

be no habitation. It is an awful tragedy when anyone turns their heart from God.

Once again God made an appeal for the people to look at the other side. Look at the blessings which could come to anyone who **trusts in God** and **one whose trust is God**. Put these two phrases together. That describes a heart forming a life that is both favorable and fruitful: *“He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.”* This verse is parallel to Psalm 1 where the psalmist talked about the tremendous and fabulous results from one whose heart was seeking God. A person who trusts God will not fear when the heat comes because his leaves will be green. Such a person does not need to be anxious during the time of drought; he will be able to survive in the hard times. He will never cease to produce fruit. Endless fruit may be the best part of all and that is the beautiful picture of a heart turned to God.

How faithful are You? If a person knows exactly how close he is to God, he might have an answer to that question. Everyone needs to look at this context and give more attention to it.

The people in the nation of Judah had lost everything: *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.”* In Jeremiah 17:9–14 God said that on the basis of the importance of the heart, He was going to search their hearts. The heart of man is deceitful. The heart of man is desperately sick. God raised the question:

“... Who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve” (Jeremiah 17:9–10).

God is going to search every heart and then He will judge and determine on the basis of what He finds there. Rather than this being a depressing fact, it ought to bring joy to the man who is

turning to God. He will build His children up, lift them up, and hold them up to become what they need to be.

Notice that in Jeremiah 17:12–14, Jeremiah switches his focus. It is interesting to compare the earlier passage in Jeremiah 15:18 with this passage:

Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails? (Jeremiah 15:18).

A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water. Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise (Jeremiah 17:12–14).

First Jeremiah charged God with being a deceptive brook or a spring that failed. Later he declared that God was the fountain of living water. That was the change that came into the heart of Jeremiah himself through the encouraging words from God along the way.

There is also a sobering statement in these verses to consider. Notice that relating with God or turning away from God will determine whether a man is **shamed** or **saved**. This is very important. Turning to God or turning away from God will determine whether man is shamed or saved. Consider again how important the heart really is.

Jeremiah 17:15–18 is Jeremiah's record of the things Judah kept saying to him. This is the passage discussed earlier concerning "*Where is the word of the LORD? Let it now be fulfilled!*" The King James Version says: ". . . let it come now!" There were a number of times Jeremiah said God was going to punish the nation of Judah, telling them God is going

to bring these things upon you (cf. Jeremiah 4:6, 5:15, 6:19, 11:8, 11, 23; 15:8, 17:15). Judah's response was "*Let it come now!*" Such was the exchange between Jeremiah and his people. For Jeremiah this was like a slap in the face for the messages he had so conscientiously delivered. It was a smile with a smirk added to it. Such was the response to God's prophet with the awful circumstance of these people and their attitude toward Jeremiah.

Notice that there is no statement of retaliation to the people from Jeremiah. Jeremiah talked to God about his conduct and his own character. He asked God to recognize the situation and to bring punishment upon these wicked people, but he did not retaliate on his own.

Jeremiah 17:19–22 reduces God's instructions for Jeremiah to "*Go and stand at the gate of the people . . . say to them . . . This is what the LORD says . . .*" Everything was reduced to one command: Keep the Sabbath! Notice what was involved in keeping the Sabbath:

"Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline. But if you are careful to obey me, declares the LORD, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever. People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory

of Benjamin and the western foothills, from the hill country and the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense and thank offerings to the house of the LORD. But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses” (Jeremiah 17:21–27).

God said if Judah would keep the Sabbath, He would bless them. This one command included the following instructions:

- “Take heed to yourselves . . .” (KJV).
- Do not carry any load on the Sabbath day.
- Do not bring any load through the gates of Jerusalem.
- Do not bring any load out of your house on the Sabbath.
- Do not do any kind of work on the Sabbath.
- Keep the Sabbath day holy.

God gave these instructions with His promises. If the people would do these things, then He would see to it that they prospered in the land. The following examples were given as a sign of prosperity:

- Men could freely enter through the gates into Jerusalem meaning there was going to be **peace** in the land.
- Kings and princes would be there. There would be great leadership meaning there would be **power** in the land.
- Men would sit on David’s throne. That was God’s approved standard meaning **God’s pattern** was in the land.
- Men would be riding on chariots and horses which were the best transportation of that day meaning there would be **prosperity** in the land.

- Everyone in the land would be bringing sacrifices and offerings. They would be devout souls meaning Judah would become a **pious and pure people** in the land.
- Thanksgivings would be offered in the house of the LORD meaning the people would be offering **praise** to God.
- “*This city will be inhabited forever.*” The Hebrew term is **olam** which means throughout the ages meaning **perpetuity** was in the land.

God promised peace, power, His pattern, prosperity, purity, praise, and perpetuity if the nation of Judah would keep the Sabbath. It needs to be understood that the Sabbath was something that was given specifically to Israel. Notice in Nehemiah 9:14–15 that the Sabbath was not made known until the days of Moses. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not keep the Sabbath. There are some who still try to keep the Sabbath in the Christian age saying that it went back to the very beginning. None of the people before the days of Moses kept the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a covenant between God and Israel. Today Christians are not under the same covenant (cf. Colossians 2:12–16). Christians do not judge one another in regard to the Sabbath day.

God told the nation of Judah during the time of Jeremiah to keep the Sabbath and He would bless them, but they did not do it. They turned their ears against it and stiffened their necks against Him. That is the sadness of a nation that would go into doom and desolation.

God, the Potter, His Principles, People, and Prophet

Jeremiah 18–20

Introduction

God reduced His commandments for the nation of Judah down to one law (cf. Jeremiah 17:19–27). If they would keep the Sabbath, then God promised that the nation would prosper. The people would be able to go in and out the gates of Jerusalem. There would be peace in the land. They would have one setting on David’s throne if they followed this one command. But the attitude of Judah was to stiffen their necks in defiance and rebellion against God. In Jeremiah 17:27 God said:

“But if you do not obey me to keep the Sabbath day holy by not carrying any load as you come through the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, then I will kindle an unquenchable fire in the gates of Jerusalem that will consume her fortresses.”

Consider the following outline for Jeremiah 18–20:

God, the Potter, and His Principles, People, and Prophet

- I. **God, the Potter, and His Principles** (Jeremiah 18)
 - A. The Potter at Work (18:1–3)
 - B. Lessons to Be Learned (18:4–11)

- C. God's Reasoning and Judah's Response (18:12–18)
- D. The Prophet's Plea to God About the People (18:19–23)
- II. **A Dramatic Demonstration Related to Shame** (Jeremiah 19)
 - A. Gathering in the Valley of Ben Hinnom (19:1–2)
 - B. The Charges and the Conduct (19:3–5)
 - C. The Promised Pain and Punishment (19:6–13)
 - D. God's Intent Reaffirmed (19:14–15)
- III. **The Prophet's Punishment, Power, Praise, and Perception** (Jeremiah 20)
 - A. The Prophet's Punishment (20:1–6)
 - B. The Prophet's Power (20:7–10)
 - C. The Prophet's Praise (20:11–13)
 - D. The Prophet's Perception (20:14–18)

God, the Potter, and His Principles

Beginning in Jeremiah 18:1 with the parable of the potter and the clay God assured Jeremiah that Judah was like the clay in a potter's hand. God asked Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house and observe him working on the wheel. As Jeremiah watched he saw that as the pot was spinning it “. . . *was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him*” (Jeremiah 1:4). Jeremiah saw that the clay spoiled in the potter's hands, but afterwards he made the marred pot into another vessel.

Jeremiah 18:1–11 gives God's principles for every man. Notice within this context that Jeremiah was beginning to identify the fact that God was not simply going to deal with the nation of Judah. He was, and still is, able to deal with any nation just as the potter dealt with the clay (cf. Jeremiah 18:7). The observation moves from a national scene to the individual scene (cf. Jeremiah 18:11). These principles were not given for

Jeremiah and Judah only; the same principles apply in the twenty-first century and all that will follow. The principle is found primarily in Jeremiah 18:7–10:

“If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.”

Notice that God declared His intent to uproot, tear down, and destroy a nation. If that nation repented, then God would change His mind in regard to the calamity He had planned to bring upon that nation. But notice that He also switched the scene, and if a nation that He had intended to build up and plant did evil, then He would “*reconsider the good*” He had intended to do. The phrase “*reconsider the good / think better*” (NASV) is from the Hebrew term **nacham** which means to lament, to grieve, to pity, and to take vengeance. God was telling Jeremiah and the nation of Judah that if a nation He had intended to build up and plant were to do evil, then He would be grieved, but He would take vengeance on that nation. That is the setting and the principle for Jeremiah 18.

There are some beautiful lessons to be learned from the message given in Jeremiah 18:1–11. Consider the following:

- Man is dependent on Deity. Men before God are like clay in the potter’s hands. Clay can do nothing by itself. Man can do nothing without the masterful touch of The Potter. Jesus said, “. . . *apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).

- God is sovereign. He has international authority to do whatever He wants with any nation. The background for this can be seen in Daniel where God lifted up and set down kings. He continues to rule over not only one nation, but all nations:

“ . . . he sets up kings and deposes them ” (Daniel 2:21).

“ O king, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor . . . God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end . . . Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians ” (Daniel 5:18, 26–28).

- God is The Planner. Just as the potter constantly works with the clay, so God is constantly working with His people. Remember Jeremiah 1:5: *“ Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. ”* Galatians 1:15 confirms that the Apostle Paul became an apostle because it was planned in the mind of God: *“ . . . who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace . . . so that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . . ”* God is conscience of each individual, of you and me, and He longs to give each one a purpose and a meaningful life.
- Man’s free will is clearly evident. Consider the scene where the clay spoiled in the potter’s hands. In that scene, there was not God’s ideal will, which is His plan for everyone, but there was God’s allowed will. Man can defy God’s plans.
- Man’s success or ruin is displayed on the basis of how he responds to what God has planned. Man can be great,

influential, purposeful, and meaningful in life, but he can also be just like Judah and take the road that leads to ruin.

- God's patience with man can be seen in Jeremiah 18:4. The potter took the clay that was spoiled and formed it into another vessel. The message is that even when man fails God can still take him where he is and move him into a productive and purposeful person if man will lend himself to God.
- This last lesson from the parable may be the most sobering of all. God's judgment and principles will prevail. This is evident in the lesson of the potter and the clay. God can do whatever He sees fit with individuals or nations. There is not only God's ideal will and His allowed will, there is also God's ultimate will. Every man will be judged by God's ultimate will.

Beginning in Jeremiah 18:12–18 there is God's reasoning and Judah's response. The sad response by Judah is briefly given in Jeremiah 18:12: *"But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.'"* Judah's response to Jeremiah in regard to how God wanted to work with them was hopeless; they said, "It is no use!"

James E. Smith in his commentary Jeremiah and Lamentations gives the real thought behind this expression of: *"There is **no hope** . . ."* (Jeremiah 18:12, KJV). The mood is not one of despondency, but one of defiance. In other words, the leaders of Judah were not just saying they were hopeless, despondent, and depressed. It was not that kind of hopelessness. It was stubborn resistance. Smith says:

The leaders are warning the prophet that it was useless for him to continue trying to convert them. They are saying in verse twelve, we have chosen our path. And

we will continue to walk in it regardless of what you say the consequences will be.²²

Notice God's response to His children in Jeremiah 18:13–17 as He declared that this was “*a most appalling thing*” (NAS):

*“Inquire among the nations: Who has ever heard anything like this? **A most horrible thing** has been done by Virgin Israel. Does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow? Yet my people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They made them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up. Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads. Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster.”*

God declared that Judah's response was “*A most horrible thing.*” God would have liked to do something for them that would be as rich and refreshing as a snow-capped mountain in Lebanon with its refreshing and sweet stream flowing down continually. God would have liked to treat His people with amazing blessings, but they, in stubborn rebellion, had taken a route of ruin. Consequently, God brought charges against the people telling them the results of their rebellion:

- “*Their land will be laid waste . . .*” The New American Standard says this will lead to a “*perpetual hissing*” and

²² Smith, James E., Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 361.

“astonishment” from everyone who passes by. They are going to be “. . . *an object of lasting scorn.*”

- The people will be scattered as they go into captivity.
- God will turn His back on the nation of Judah because they had turned from Him in their hearts.

Jeremiah seems to grasp the facts of what God was telling him because of the percentage pattern. In Jeremiah 18:18, Jeremiah found himself outnumbered as he described three groups who wanted to attack him: the priest, the wise, and the prophets. All three were seeking to “. . . *attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says.*”

Jeremiah 18:19–23 gives Jeremiah’s response to God about the people. Basically he wanted God to have one ear listening to the good he was trying to do for the people and one ear listening to what the people were doing in response toward Jeremiah. Jeremiah wanted God to punish the people by giving them over to famine and the sword:

So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them . . . Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger (Jeremiah 18:21–23).

Why did Jeremiah want all of this to happen to his people?

There is an underlying message. This is part of the section discussed earlier in the channel studies. Remember that in Jeremiah 11–20 Jeremiah was going through his confession stage and a growth process. He had not only been declaring a horrific message, but since he was beginning to grasp the fact

that these people were not going to change, he was ready for God to act against the people.

At this point Jeremiah's cry for God to act against the people was more personal than the fact that his message was part of God's precepts. God had declared that these things were going to happen and Jeremiah believed. Notice in Jeremiah 18:20 how personal his plea was:

*“Yet they have **dug a pit for me** . . . for they have **dug a pit** to capture me and have **hidden snares** for my feet. But you know, O LORD, their **plots to kill me** . . .”*
(Jeremiah 18:20–23).

Jeremiah wanted God to react against the people for what they had tried to do to him. This was a totally different spirit on the part of the prophet contrasted with the spirit exhibited by Jesus hanging on the cross with the mob mocking Him. In Luke 23:34, “*Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’*” If Jeremiah had been able to see Jesus on the cross, I believe he would have saluted Him and said, “Jesus, this is your finest hour!” The prophet knew that in face of the same kind of actions against him, he had caved in. He did not want anything but harm for the people who were persecuting him.

A Dramatic Demonstration Related to Shame

Jeremiah 19:1–5 contains five charges made by God through Jeremiah against the nation of Judah. Notice that for this section of scripture the setting was drastically different. Consider what God asked Jeremiah to do:

This is what the LORD says: “Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests and go out to the Valley of

Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you, and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle. For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent. They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal — something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter'” (Jeremiah 19:1–6).

God told Jeremiah to take the elders, the senior priests, and the kings with him into the Valley of Ben Hinnom, also called the Valley of Topheth. The prominent people of Judah were to gather in that valley for this particular message. Jeremiah delivered five bold charges against these people:

- **They had forsaken God!** Check carefully in Jeremiah 1–19. This same charge had been brought fourteen times against these people over a number of years. They still had not changed.
- **They had made Jerusalem and the temple an alien place!** God had set Jerusalem and the temple aside as a place of honor and a place to glorify Him. They had turned it into an alien place, a strange place, a place of shame and sadness by what was occurring there.
- **They had offered their sacrifices to other gods!**

- **They had filled Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent!** Some poor innocent and some good prophets had been slain.
- **They had offered their sons on the altar to Baal!** This was the greatest charge of all.

Beginning in Jeremiah 19:6–13 God warned the people of His promised punishment and pain: “*Beware, the days are coming . . .*”

- God renamed the Valley of Ben Hinnom “*. . . the Valley of Slaughter.*” The name was not changed because of the number of babies that had been killed there. That was the shame of what had occurred there in that valley. God was talking about the slaughter of the people of Judah when the forces from the north would come and leave their bloated bodies because there would be no one to bury the dead. What a horrifying judgment upon these people!
- God said, “*In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem . . .*” (Jeremiah 19:7). That simply means that when men cannot think right, they cannot walk right. Judah could not think straight and would not walk straight.
- There is an interesting comparison between Jeremiah 19:5 and 9. In 19:5 the charge was made against the nation of Judah that they had offered their sons upon the altars of Baal. In Jeremiah 19:5 God told them that because they had taken that step against Him, He was going make them eat their own children. Imagine something as horrifying and inhuman as that.
- God said that their houses would be defiled, destroyed, and burned.

Check this out carefully. There is a beautiful balance between Judah's shame and God's sentence, between the pollution they had brought in and the price they would have to pay. God was balancing the books. Man does indeed reap what he has sown (cf. Galatians 6:7). Notice there was no response at all from Judah to this message from God delivered in the Valley of Ben Hinnom. Perhaps it was such a bold, blunt, horrifying thought that had been unfolded before them that they were left speechless at that moment.

In Jeremiah 19:14–15 notice that God's intent was reaffirmed. God wanted the same message to be delivered in the court of the temple:

Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD's temple and said to all the people, "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.'"

The Prophet's Punishment, Power, Praise, and Perception

Once the message from God was delivered in the court of the temple there was a reaction to the bold blast of pain and punishment that was to come upon the people of Judah. Beginning in Jeremiah 20 remember that this is considered the hinge chapter between Jeremiah's prophetic life. Up to this point he had accomplished his mission, but often he did it with murmuring and complaining even to the point of declaring that God was a deceitful brook (cf. Jeremiah 15:18) and other such statements. From Jeremiah 20 onward Jeremiah faced harder times, but he never complained one time (cf. Jeremiah 26, 28,

36, 38, 43). This is the hinge chapter showing the maturity of this fabulous prophet of God.

After the message had been delivered again in the court of the LORD's house, Jeremiah's punishment began. It came from Pashhur, the priest and chief officer in the temple. He had Jeremiah arrested and beaten, and then placed in stocks. C.J. Ball in his commentary on Jeremiah, The Expositor's Bible, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, has an explanation for what this would have been like:

The prophet was beaten and then for the remainder part of that day and all night long, the prophet had to sit at the Upper Gate of Benjamin. First he was exposed to the taunts and jeers of his adversaries and the rabble of their followers. Then as the weary hours slowly crept, he would have become painfully cramped in his limbs by the barbarous machine which held his hands and feet near together and bent his body double. This cruel punishment seems to have been the customary mode of dealing with such as were accounted false prophets by the authorities. This was the same treatment that Hanani, the seer, endured in return for his warning to King Asa for relying on the king of Aram instead of the LORD (cf. 2 Chronicles 16:10).²³

Jeremiah went through the ordeal of being in the stocks, but for some reason on the next day he was released. Maybe Pashhur thought this punishment was sufficient to cause Jeremiah to shut up. Instead of being intimidated, Jeremiah gave more revelation, ones that were especially directed at Pashhur himself. Jeremiah said:

²³ Ball, C.J., The Expositor's Bible, The Prophecies of Jeremiah, Chap. 1–20, (W. Robertson Nicoll, editor), A.C. Armstrong and Son, London, 1903, p. 411–412.

. . . “The LORD’s name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib. For this is what the LORD says: ‘I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword. I will hand over to their enemies all the wealth of this city — all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies’” (Jeremiah 20:3–6).

Pashhur’s new name meant, “Terror on every side.” That meant that all the people who had listened to his false prophecies were going to be in a group surrounding him and he would have to watch them die one after the other as the fruit of his own folly. Think about what they would have thought of him as they died, knowing that he had lied to them. All of this would be occurring to add pain to pain in a strange land as they were finally taken into captivity. Babylon would be where Pashhur died.

For the first time Babylon was named as the place of punishment, “. . . I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword” (Jeremiah 20:4). This verse identifies the force from the north. Jeremiah also declared that all of their precious treasures would be taken away. That might not sound like an extreme punishment, but in the minds of the people of Judah it would be because they cared more about their treasures than they did for the people. These were bold statements from a great prophet. He was not intimidated by Pashhur or the people of Judah.

Jeremiah’s power and his sad plight are clearly identified in Jeremiah 20:7–10. Notice all that he endured:

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

- **Mocking:** This had been going on a long time. Jeremiah said, *"I am ridiculed all day long . . ."* For a person to laugh a little while after someone speaks hurts, but to have a person laugh all day long day after day would be unbearable.
- **Masses:** Who was ridiculing Jeremiah? He said, *" . . . everyone mocks me."* He was not ridiculed by a few, but by the masses of people in the nation of Judah.
- **Message:** Jeremiah was ridiculed all day long because of the message he was called to deliver, *"Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction."* He did not see any hope of change either. That was the message he had to deliver because it was what Judah needed to hear.
- **Meanness:** Jeremiah said, *"So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long."* Such was the agony of what this prophet endured day after day, week after week, and year after year as he preached before the people of Judah.
- **Mindset:** It is no wonder then that within Jeremiah's heart there was the mindset, *"I will not mention him or speak any more in his name."* Such was the mindset that had been creeping up inside of Jeremiah, not on this day, but

after twenty years of working among his people. He knew that in his own heart, he was ready to quit. The primary message of the scene in Jeremiah 20:7–10 is identified in the discovery that the prophet made at this point in regard to the message he was delivering:

... His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot (Jeremiah 20:9).

The prophet had reached the same point as Peter when he was facing death in Acts 4:19–20 and he boldly said:

“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

That was the bold statement Peter made before the Sanhedrin court. It is the same kind of statement Jeremiah made before Pashhur and the nation of Judah. Jeremiah could not keep the Word of God from going out, but he knew in his heart he would have quit.

Notice Jeremiah’s focus. He had finally grasped what God had originally promised him. He finally realized that God had truly made him to be a fortified city, a pillar of iron, a wall of bronze to the whole land whether it was to be before kings, princes, priests, prophets, or all the people. Jeremiah knew that he would stand in all situations only because of what God had done for him (cf. Jeremiah 1:17–19).

Jeremiah’s situation really had not changed. His friends were still waiting for him to make a mistake. They were not just a few, but many whispering all around him. The word Jeremiah used to describe his situation, *“Terror on every side!”* (Jeremiah 20:10) is the same word Jeremiah used to describe what was going to happen to Pashhur, *“I will make you a terror to yourself . . .”* (Jeremiah 20:4). Jeremiah recognized what

was ahead, but he knew he could stand and these people would fall. They would be the ones who failed. Their goal was to denounce him with ungodly gossip looking for any little mistake he might make. He called them his “*friends*,” but he knew this was not the case. They were watching him, observing his every move. They longed to deceive him and to seek revenge or even inflict punishment and rebuke him.

Jeremiah knew he was going to have to stand against the nation of Judah, his own people. Knowing God had prepared him gave him the resolve to continue to speak. Jeremiah offered praise to the LORD because he knew his enemies were going to be the ones to fail because God was his “*mighty warrior*.” In Jeremiah 20:11–13, the prophet proclaimed what was ahead for the nation of Judah:

- They “*. . . will stumble*.”
- They “*. . . will not prevail*.” They would not be able to stop Jeremiah.
- They “*. . . will fail*” as a nation.
- They “*. . . will be thoroughly disgraced*.” This phrase has been used eight times already (cf. Jeremiah 2:26, 8:9, 12:13, 14:3–4, 15:9, 17:13).
- “*Their dishonor will never be forgotten*.”

God would “*. . . examine the **righteous** and probe the heart and mind . . . He rescues the life of the **needy** from the hands of the wicked*” (Jeremiah 20:12–13). Jeremiah used these two words to refer to himself, one who had been truly tested by God.

Jeremiah knew he was going to be able to enjoy victory and triumph. He also knew God deserved his praise and one day others would “*Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD!*” (Jeremiah 20:13). Jeremiah was an amazing prophet to have gone through the things he did and accomplish the work he continued to do.

Notice the prophet's perception in Jeremiah 20:14–18. Many commentators do not understand why Jeremiah went from praising the LORD into such a deep depression in this final portion of chapter twenty. I don't think that is what happened at all in this portion of scripture. Some have put the emphasis "*Cursed be the day I was born!*" saying that at this point Jeremiah really wanted to die. That was not what he was saying. Look carefully, put the emphasis on "*the day*" in which they were living. Jeremiah was saying, "It is a horrifying day" in Judah's history. Two things were clear in his mind at this point.

- God was going to take care of him and he was going to be like a fortified city, like a pillar of iron and walls of bronze to the whole land.
- The people of Judah at this time were a devastated, destructive, and doom-oriented generation. Jeremiah knew they were going to fall, yet some continued to say "Peace, Peace!" when there would be no peace. Others acted as if they were secure, but they were on a suicide trip mentally and physically.

Jeremiah realized this generation of people would fail. The nation of Judah was doomed. Jeremiah was trying to tell them they should not act like this was a good day. Everything was not going to be all right. They were going to end their days in shame.

God's Explanation for His Actions

Jeremiah 21–23

Introduction

Just as Jeremiah 20 was a hinge chapter of discovery and a discerning moment for Jeremiah and his prophetic life, Jeremiah 21–25 will contain clarification and justification dealing with God's response to Judah and to the nations. James E. Smith in his commentary, Jeremiah and Lamentations, has this section tabbed topically and divided into two subdivisions: God and the leaders of Judah (Jeremiah 21–24) and God and the world order (Jeremiah 25).²⁴ This section of scripture is not given in chronological order. The emphasis seems to be God's explanation for His actions against Judah and the nations. Notice the following outline and also for reference once again the chronological order of the various kings mentioned in these chapters:

God's Explanation for His Actions

- I. **The Ways of War to the Wicked (Jeremiah 21)**
 - A. The Ways of War Against Jerusalem and Zedekiah (Jeremiah 21:1–7)
 - B. The Ways of War Against the People (Jeremiah 21:8–10)

²⁴ Smith, James E., Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 383.

- C. The Ways of War Against the Household of the King of Judah (Jeremiah 21:11–14)
- II. **The Kings of Judah in Review** (Jeremiah 22)
 - A. King Zedekiah (Jeremiah 22:1–9)
 - B. King Jehoahaz (Jeremiah 22:10–12)
 - C. King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:13–23)
 - D. King Jehoiachin (Jeremiah 22:24–30)
- III. **Prophecy About Pastors, the Promised King, and Perils for False Prophets** (Jeremiah 23)
 - A. Prophetic Problems, Perils, and a Promise Concerning Pastors (Jeremiah 23:1–4)
 - B. The Promised Messiah and a Glorious Return (Jeremiah 23:5–8)
 - C. The Menace of False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:9–15)
 - D. The Message of False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:16–24)
 - E. The Methods of False Prophets (Jeremiah 23:25–32)
 - F. The Misery for this Mockery (Jeremiah 23:33–40)

- King Jehoahaz or “*Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah*” (Jeremiah 22:10–12, cf. 2 Kings 23:29–34; 2 Chronicles 36:1–4) reigned 609 B.C.
- King “*Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah*” (Jeremiah 22:13–23, 25; cf. 2 Kings 23:34–24:6; 2 Chronicles 36:5–8) reigned 605–598 B.C.
- King “*Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah*” also known as King Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24–30, 24:1; 2 Kings 24:6–16; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:9–10) reigned in 598 B.C.
- “*King Zedekiah . . . king of Judah*” (Jeremiah 21:1–7, 23:1–40, 24:1–10, 27:1, 28:1; cf. 2 Kings 24:17–20; 2 Chronicles 36:10–12) reigned 597–588 B.C.

Jeremiah 21 actually begins with King Zedekiah and the very end of the nation of Judah. Why would God choose to

have these chapters in a backward chronological order? Notice that in this section of scripture God was justifying His actions against Judah before the conflicts with Babylon began. Jeremiah 21 speeds forward to the very last king of the nation of Judah. God could use this method because He knew exactly how the people would be responding at the end. He used their responses to justify why He was doing what He was going to do to them even in the intervening kings who came before the end.

Using the backward chronological order God through Jeremiah showed the nation of Judah the pattern they had followed. Remember in Jeremiah 3 God pleaded with the people to come back to Him. Judah confessed their sins, but they did not correct their lives. In Jeremiah 14 God used famine to plead with His children to return. At that point He got their attention, but they blamed God saying He was supposed to be a God who took care of them, so again they rebelled and did not repent. In Jeremiah 21 at the end of the nation of Judah God brought war to get Judah's attention. At this point Judah was basically asking God to act and take care of their needs, but there was still no penitence. Hence God justified His actions against them because even down to their final hours, they did not respond to Him.

The Ways of War to the Wicked

Beginning in Jeremiah 21:1–7 the war against Jerusalem and Zedekiah is covered. The setting actually began with the people of Judah wanting Jeremiah to go to God on their behalf, but God assured them that was not how it worked. When man builds his own god, that god is supposed to grant him fertility, prosperity, and good things. God will do whatever it takes to make people what they ought to be. Sometimes that does not involve good, sometimes it is punishment instead. Notice in Jeremiah 21:4–5 God said:

“I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the kind

of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city. I myself will fight against you with an out-stretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath."

It is important to understand God's position at this point. He had pleaded with these people for twenty years to change their ways and to do what they ought to do. Now He is ready to act bringing the soldiers of Babylon against them. Notice that in Jeremiah 21:8–10 during the ninth year of King Zedekiah the people were given an option to live if they would surrender to the Chaldeans. Those who would not surrender were going to die within the city by "*. . . the sword, famine or plague*" (Jeremiah 21:9). Most of the people refused to surrender. They were going to follow the course they wanted to follow regardless of what God said.

God basically declared "war" against the "*. . . the royal house of Judah*" (Jeremiah 21:11). There is some discussion about what the term "*household*" means. In the Hebrew the term could apply either to the king's immediate family or it is a term used to apply to the king's official governmental family and those around him. Since Jeremiah 21:12 mentions "*'Administer justice every morning . . .'*" it is safe to conclude that this term referred to King Zedekiah's official family. There was not going to be any security for those officials because God was going to punish them "*. . . because of the evil you have done . . . I will punish you as your deeds deserve*" (Jeremiah 21:12–14). God knew these people were not going to change.

The Kings of Judah in Review

Personally, I believe the first nine verses of Jeremiah 22 should be included with the verses from Jeremiah 21 without any chapter break. Notice my reasoning for this belief:

- There are parallel expressions about Zedekiah in Jeremiah 21:5 and 22:5. In both of these verses God said, *"I myself"* and *"I swear by myself."*
- Notice that Jeremiah 21:11 and 22:6 are also parallel verses. I think God was talking about the same house, the same king, and the same people in these verses.
- The circumstances in Jeremiah 22:5 fit better into the days of Zedekiah than they would have during the days of Jehoahaz. Remember that King Nebuchadnezzar came in the ninth year of King Zedekiah and the Babylonians camped around Jerusalem for the next eighteen months. An army has to live, so when an army camps around a city, it will also consume. That would explain *"... they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire"* (Jeremiah 22:7). The Babylonian army used and consumed what they needed from the area around Jerusalem.
- Jeremiah 22:1–5 once again identifies the possible option of still having kings who would sit on David's throne if only these people would honor God's law. That option fits into the context of God justifying the fact that He gave them every chance to turn back to Him. And yet Judah still rebelled.

The message of Jeremiah 22:1–9 was given to *"the king of Judah"* proclaiming the downfall of the nation. There were three positive actions followed by four negative commands that God asked of the people. In Jeremiah 22:3 God said:

- *"Do what is just."*
- *"Do what is . . . right."*
- *"Rescue the robbed from the oppressor."*
- *"Do no wrong or violence to the alien."*
- *"Do no wrong or violence to . . . the fatherless."*
- *"Do no wrong or violence to . . . the widow."*
- *"Do not shed innocent blood."*

Look at the last three in this list: the fatherless, the widows, and the innocent are the weakest elements in society. Judah had been guilty of treading upon these very ones. God said do not do it! He told Judah that if they would follow these commands, “. . . *then kings [would enter] through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people*” (Jeremiah 22:4). God warned the people that if His commands were not obeyed then the land would become desolated, wasted, and ruined. The palace of the king was going to become a deserted wilderness. God was giving them an opportunity to do what they ought to do.

Jeremiah 22:10–12 deals with the king who followed Josiah as king over Judah, King Jehoahaz (Shallum in the Hebrew). God told the people not to weep for “. . . *the dead*” referring to King Josiah. They needed to weep for Jehoahaz because he would be overcome by the Egyptian forces and carried into exile to die in Egypt. He would never see his native land again.

Jeremiah 22:13–23 contains the comments concerning Jehoiakim. This king of Judah was a leader, but all of his leadership went in the wrong direction. Many of the nation followed the left-hand tendencies of this king. He was selfish to the core. This section of scripture contains some good points concerning what success is by comparing King Jehoiakim with his father King Josiah, a good king for Judah. Success is not:

- “. . . *build[ing] . . . by unrighteousness*” — Many of the people had done this very thing by cutting corners and abusing people.
- “*making . . . countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.*” Jehoiakim got what he wanted out of people and then would not pay them.
- “*build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms*” — Some people even today think that if they had a beautiful mansion that would be all they need.

- A beautifully furnished house — Jehoiakim had a beautiful palace inside and out. He made “*. . . large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.*”
- Having materials things so that you can compete with others — “*Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar?*”
- “*. . . your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain*” — Such was exactly the course that Jehoiakim followed.
- “*. . . shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion.*” — Jehoiakim was guilty of committing these even most devastating acts.

Notice in the end what Jehoiakim's actions brought for him. Men did not mourn for him. They did not praise him or give him any kind of glory or honor. There was no beauty or majesty attributed to him when he died (cf. Jeremiah 22:18). Usually when even a bad king died, he would be given some type of honorable burial. Such was not the case with Jehoiakim: “*He will have the burial of a donkey — dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem*” (Jeremiah 22:19). He was going to be buried as if he was a beast. The picture in context with these verses in Jeremiah 22 and 36 along with 2 Kings 23:34–37, 24:1–6 and 2 Chronicles 36:5–8 seems to say that King Jehoiakim was captured by King Nebuchadnezzar. On his way to Babylon in chains, he apparently died and they simply threw his body off to the side as if he were a donkey. These verses present the sad scene and the downfall of King Jehoiakim.

In contrast to Jehoiakim consider what God attributed as the successful life of his father King Josiah:

- “*He did what was right and just.*”
- “*He defended the cause of the poor and needy.*”
- “*Is that not what it means to know me?*” — He had come to know God.

The result of King Josiah doing these things was a successful life as seen in Jeremiah 22:15–16: he had “. . . *food and drink . . . so all went well with him . . . so all went well.*” God takes care of the people who take an interest in the principles He has given.

Jeremiah 22:24–30 covers “*Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah.*” He was also known as Coniah or Jeconiah. God removed the signet ring from his right hand, stripping him of his authority, and delivered him into the hands of “*Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians.*” He did go into Babylonian captivity but later in captivity Jehoiachin was released from prison and given a seat of honor:

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison . . . He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived, till the day of his death (Jeremiah 52:31–34; cf. 2 Kings 25:27–30).

Notice that in Jeremiah 22:30 God said, “*Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime . . .*” In 1 Chronicles 3:17–18 it is recorded that Jehoiachin had seven sons. The significant point is “. . . *none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule any more in Judah.*” He died childless without any of his sons being able to rule upon the throne of David in **Jerusalem**. This is important when Matthew begins his Gospel:

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David . . . and Josiah the father of Jeconiah . . . at the

time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of . . . (Matthew 1:1, 11–12).

Jesus Christ was of the lineage of Jeconiah/Coniah or of Jehoiachin as he is called in Jeremiah. God said, “. . . *none of his offspring . . . will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah*” (Jeremiah 22:30). These verses negate the Pre-Millennialist's theory that Jesus Christ is going to come back to the earth, sit on David's throne in Jerusalem, and reign for a thousand years. This prophetic expression kills any chance of that happening: “*none of his offspring*” will ever sit on David's throne in Jerusalem to reign ever again.

The Horrors of the False Prophets

Jeremiah 23:1–4 covers the perils and a promise concerning pastors. God declared that “*the shepherds*” were destroying and scattering His people through a lack of leadership. The people in the north had already gone into Assyrian captivity. Judah was suffering from a lack of leadership from those who should have been sheltering them with His scriptures. Instead they would end up serving in Babylon or Egypt. Notice that Ezekiel 34:1–31 parallels Jeremiah 23:1–8 declaring the nature of the men who are supposed to be shepherds of God's flock.

God did offer a ray of hope and a promise in Jeremiah 23:3–4:

“I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing” declares the LORD.

God will gather His people. He will bring them back to their homeland. They will be fruitful and multiply. God will raise up shepherds to attend to them.

The Promised Messiah and a Glorious Return

Within the three short verses of Jeremiah 23:5–8 there is a golden jewel containing a messianic promise. There are nine tributes paid to the Messiah:

- The Messiah as promised will be a descendant of David fulfilling the prophecy of 2 Samuel 7:12–16.
- The Messiah is called “*a righteous Branch*” in the English translations. The Hebrew word refers to a sprout, a bud, or shoot meaning the Messiah will come from the root directly out of the ground. A branch could come from anywhere on the tree even somewhere up at the top. The “root” idea that God has given from the days of David will be fulfilled in this Messiah cf. Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:12; Revelation 5:5, 22:16).
- The Messianic Shoot will be raised up by God. Only God could have kept a lineage alive that would bring Jesus as promised down through the seed of Abraham.
- The Messiah will be a “*righteous Branch*” or Shoot (cf. Isaiah 53:9–11).
- The Messiah shall reign as King. That is now a reality and has been since Revelation 3:21 or Acts 2 when Peter declared that Jesus had ascended to sit down at the right hand of God.
- The Messiah “*will reign wisely.*” That was so needed in Judah during Jeremiah’s time.
- The Messiah will “. . . *do what is just and right in the land.*” He will execute justice, bringing in purity in place of the pollution that the present pastors had given to the nation of Judah.
- The Messiah will reunite Israel and Judah under His rule. This occurred when the people came out of Assyrian and

Babylonian captivities to rebuild the temple and settle again in the land (cf. Ezekiel 37:15–23) but continuing from that point forward to Jesus Christ Himself.

- The Messiah shall bear the name “*The LORD Our Righteousness.*”

People must let this Messiah be their LORD. He will be the One who is “*Righteousness.*” Notice that He is the “*righteous Branch,*” He will do what is “*right in the land,*” and He will be “*The LORD Our Righteousness.*” This is a golden, beautiful picture in the midst of the pollution seen in Jeremiah 23.

Contrast the picture in the middle of Jeremiah 23 to the horrible picture of the menace, the message, and the methods of the false prophets. Look at the results from the conduct of these false prophets in Jeremiah 23:9–15:

- Immoral — “*The land is full of adulterers . . .*”
- Impenitent — The land mourns because of the “*curse*” that was coming upon it because of evil deeds.
- Impoverished — “*. . . the land lies parched and the pastures in the desert are withered.*” The nation was going to be no more.
- Impudent — “*The prophets follow an evil course . . .*” Impudent basically means someone who is shameless, bold, and brazen. Such was the way the prophets were in Judah during this time.
- Impurity — “*The prophets . . . use their power unjustly.*” The might and the force these prophets used was not right.

God saw horrible things happening in the land because of the conduct of these false prophets (cf. Jeremiah 23:9–15):

- His people were being led astray: “*They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray*” (Jeremiah 23:13). They were going in the wrong direction.

- His people were committing adultery: *"They commit adultery. . ."* which causes homes to fall apart. There were domestic departures throughout the land.
- His people were walking in falsehood: *"They live a lie."* The prophets were teaching lies, making wrong declarations among the people.
- His prophets *" . . . strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from his wickedness."* There was the wrong kind of influence throughout the land.
- His people were *" . . . like Sodom to me; the people of Jerusalem are like Gomorrah."*

In Jeremiah 23:16–24 God spoke concerning the message of the prophets in the land. God declared that the prophets were leading the people in futility. They were speaking visions from their own imaginations. They kept telling the people *"The LORD says: You will have peace."* when there could be no peace in the land. The prophets said, *"No harm will come to you."* but all of this was a lie. There is a need in this twenty-first century for man to heed 1 John 4:1 with all the false teachings that are present:

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

God knew the methods used by these false prophets. He said:

"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!' How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as

their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship”
(Jeremiah 23:25–27).

God pleaded:

“Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?” declares the LORD
(Jeremiah 23:28).

There are four stages (tests and standards) for all who would step up to speak for God from this one phrase:

“... let the one who has my word speak it faithfully ...” (Jeremiah 23:28):

- Let him who has **My word** — *“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God . . .”* (1 Peter 4:11). It is important to know that it is the Word of God.
- Let him who has **My word speak** — *“His word is in my heart like a fire . . . I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot”* (Jeremiah 20:9; cf. Acts 4:19–20, 5:40–42). Too many have been silent when they needed to take a stand; people need to speak when they have His Word.
- Let him who has **My word speak My word** — *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .”* (Romans 1–25; cf. 1 Corinthians 9:16, 2:2–5; 2 Corinthians 4:5–7). It is important that God’s Word is spoken and not just something else.
- **Let him who has My word, speak My word faithfully!** God’s plea in the midst of all the falsehood from the prophets was that they speak His Word faithfully.

Jeremiah 23:33–40 records the misery for the people that would come through the prophet for their mockery of God's message. The key word in this section of scripture is the word "burden" (KJV) or "oracle" — "*What is the oracle of the LORD?*" (Jeremiah 23:33). It is basically a means or a statement that relates to the grievous, threatening oracle, but sometimes it is used in a good sense. These people had rebelled against God saying, "*What is the burden of the LORD?*" They were mocking Jeremiah and laughing about his prophecies. God told Jeremiah not to even mention "*the oracle of the LORD*" anymore.

God promised a threefold punishment upon these people:

"Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers. I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace — everlasting shame that will not be forgotten" (Jeremiah 23:39–40).

- "*I will surely forget you . . .*" — Remember Not!
- "*I will surely . . . cast you out of my presence along with the city . . .*" — Remain Not!
- "*I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace — everlasting shame . . .*" — Respect Not!

Such was the eulogy for a people who rebelled too long against God: Remembered not, remained not, and respected not.

God's Fidelity and the Timetable of Tragedies

Jeremiah 24–27

Introduction

Jeremiah 24 is God's beautiful answer in parabolic form to His declaration in Jeremiah 23:

“I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers. I will bring upon your everlasting disgrace— everlasting shame that will not be forgotten” (Jeremiah 23:39–40).

It is almost possible to hear the people in the nation of Judah asking how God could cast His own people away from His presence. Jeremiah 24 is the parable of the two baskets of figs, the very good and the ones which are so bad they cannot be eaten.

Notice the outline for these chapters:

God's Fidelity and the Timetable of Tragedies

- I. The Parable Presented and God's Plans (Jeremiah 24)**
 - A. During the Reign of Zedekiah (24:1)
 - B. The Figs Were Set Before the Temple of the LORD (24:1–3)
 - C. God's Plan for the Good Figs (24:4–7)

- D. God's Plan for the Rebellious Remnant (24:8–10)
- II. God's Judgment on Judah and the Nations** (Jeremiah 25)
 - A. Timetable of Tragedy (25:1–3)
 - B. God's Judgment on Judah (25:4–11)
 - C. God's Judgment on Babylon (25:12–14)
 - D. God's Judgment on Surrounding Nations (25:15–29)
 - E. Nations to Be Judged
 - F. God's Judgment on All the Inhabitants of Earth (25:30–38)
- III. The Prophet on Trial Between Truth and Traitors** (Jeremiah 26)
 - A. The Sermon in the Court of the LORD's House (26:1–7)
 - B. A Sentence Given to God's Prophet (26:8–11)
 - C. A Stand by God's Prophet (26:12–15)
 - D. The Suit Against Jeremiah Appealed (26:16–19)
 - E. The Suit Prosecuted Against Jeremiah (26:20–23)
 - F. A Significant Summary Statement (26:24)
- IV. The Years of the Yoke of Babylon** (Jeremiah 27)
 - A. The Central Figure Is the God of Israel (27:1–11)
 - B. A Warning to King Zedekiah (27:12–15)
 - C. A Warning to the Priests and all the People (27:16–22)

The Parable Presented and God's Plans

God set the stage in Jeremiah 24 with "*After Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah [and the people] . . . were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon . . .*" (Jeremiah 24:1). God showed Jeremiah two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD. Then God asked the prophet, "*What do you see, Jeremiah?*" Jeremiah saw some figs that were very good and some that were so bad they could not be eaten because they were so rotten. The bad figs had lost their mission

and their purpose. God had a plan for the good people as compared to the good figs. He also had a plan for the rebellious remnant among His people.

Notice the picture from God of the people who would ultimately be “*good figs*.” God had cast them out because He knew it was going to take that action to cleanse them. He said, “. . . *I regard as good the exiles from Judah, who I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians*” (Jeremiah 24:5). The fact that they went into captivity was a part of God’s good plan. Notice the following lessons in Jeremiah 24:4–7:

- To Captivity — “*I regard as good the exiles from Judah, who I sent away . . .*” God was proving the people to purify them.
- In Captivity — “*My eyes will watch over them for their good . . .*” God was going to protect His people.
- From Captivity — “*I will bring them back to this land.*” God’s providential guidance can be seen in this phrase.
- Beyond Captivity — “*I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.*” God was going to provide for His people.
- Objectivity — “*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD.*” The perception of the people was going to change. They were going to know God.
- Divine Captivity — “*They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.*” The people were going to have a premier relationship with God.

That was why God would cast His own people out of His presence — “*. . . for their good . . .*”

Knowing the rebellious nature of the people, God knew the nation of Judah would turn away from Him. God described the circumstances in relation to the “*poor figs, which are so bad they cannot be eaten . . .*” in Jeremiah 24:8–10. This section of scripture revolves around the fact that God was going to

abandon His people. God said He was going to abandon and punish these people, breaking them into three groups of people: Zedekiah, the king and his officials, the survivors from Jerusalem who would remain in the land, and the survivors from Jerusalem who would dwell in the land of Egypt. Zedekiah and his official did not repent. The survivors from Jerusalem did not change. Jeremiah 43–44 will echo the fact that these people never did come back to God. In the most sickening and stubborn rebellion they turned away from God until their death.

In Jeremiah 24:5–10 there are fourteen verbal directives from God depending on the Bible version being used. Nine times He said what He would do for the good of the people (cf. Jeremiah 24:5–7). Five times God said what He would not do (cf. Jeremiah 24:8–10). Each of these directives is centered around the word “*will*” and connected with verbs of action.

God's Judgment on Judah and the Nations

Jeremiah 25 is a unique chapter. If Jeremiah 20 is considered a hinge chapter in regard to Jeremiah's life personally as he got things in focus before God and the nation of Judah, then Jeremiah 25 is the hinge chapter for Jeremiah's life prophetically. The scope of Jeremiah's work is covered in these verses.

Notice the precise timing for the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic life:

The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. So Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem: For twenty-three years — from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of

Judah until this very day — the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened (Jeremiah 25:1–3).

This chapter also predicted the seventy years of servitude to the king of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 25:11). This chapter also clearly shows that Jeremiah 46–51, the prophecies against the Gentile nations, were actually given in this fourth year of Jehoiakim, which is the timetable for this chapter (cf. Jeremiah 25:1). Notice that Jeremiah 25:13 says: “*I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in **this book** and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations.*” “*This book*” refers to Jeremiah 46–51, which was given at this time, but will show up later. This is evident in the message recorded in Jeremiah 45:1 stating that a scroll was written by Baruch:

This is what Jeremiah the prophet told Baruch son of Neriah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah after Baruch has written on a scroll the words Jeremiah was then dictating.

Jeremiah 46–51 are the words from the LORD that Baruch wrote for Jeremiah. These are a few details to keep in mind.

God's judgment on Judah is really covered in Jeremiah 25:4–8. God was addressing His people as He spoke of the people and the land in contrast to “*all the peoples of the north*” and “*this whole country*” in Jeremiah 25:9 and 11. God was simply bringing the same pleas and charges to His own people that He had uttered in previous chapters of Jeremiah. He said:

“Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you” (Jeremiah 25:6).

God wanted His people to obey His words, but the nation of Judah did not listen. God gave promises that were equally clear telling them that they could stay in the land that had been given *"to you and your fathers for ever and ever"* if they would only do what He asked. God told them He would do them no harm. There has been a repetition of these pleas, promises, and charges.

God also had a punishment plan for the nation of Judah. If they were not going to obey His law, then the peoples of the north and God's servant Nebuchadnezzar were going to be brought against *"... this land and its inhabitants and all the surrounding nations."* God was going to *"completely destroy"* His own people and *"make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin"* (Jeremiah 25:9). Outsiders would taunt, rebuke, and mock God's people. God was going to *"... banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp"* (Jeremiah 25:10). There would be no joy for the people and they would cower in fear. God gave them the specifics of what was going to happen, even telling them their sentence of servitude to the king of Babylon was going to be for seventy years. That was God's judgment on His people. God also had a punishment plan for the king of Babylon and his nation (cf. Jeremiah 25:12–14, 50:1–51:64).

Beginning in Jeremiah 25:15 God's judgment upon the surrounding nations is pronounced. Notice that God told Jeremiah He was going to send a sword among them. He also told Jeremiah to take a cup from His hand and make all the nations drink from it. God said, *"... this cup filled with the wine of my wrath . . ."* Notice some of the descriptive phrases regarding the wrath of the Almighty: fire and brimstone and burning wind, drunk but not with wine, a cup of horror and desolation, and the wine of the wrath of God (cf. Jeremiah 25:17–29). That is the kind of cup it was with the emphasis on God's wrath. These verses deal with His anger, judgment, and punishments rather than a liquid drink.

“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon” is referred to as God’s servant who will be carrying out these functions against the people (cf. Jeremiah 25:9). God told Jeremiah to take the cup from His hand and to make all the nations drink from it. There is really no way to know the method Jeremiah used to accomplish this task, but the message is clear:

“Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you . . . You must drink it! See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city . . . You will not go unpunished for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth” (Jeremiah 25:27–29).

The drink was symbolic of the suffering that the sword was going to bring on the nations.

Notice that the list of the nations geographically starts from the south and moves northward as it swings to the east and to the west among these nations. Consider the nations that are mentioned in Jeremiah 25:19–26 and notice the pattern of geographic sequential movement:

- Jerusalem and all Judah
- Egypt: Pharaoh-Necho was probably the one strong element at that time trying to keep Babylon from becoming a world empire. He was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish on the Euphrates (cf. 2 Chronicles 35:20–36:8).
- Uz (a district of Edom)(moving to the north)
- Philistines (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod)(to the west of the Dead Sea and the Jordan River)
- Edom, Moab, and Ammon (moving northward, but east of the Dead Sea)
- Tyre and Sidon (to the west on the Mediterranean Sea)
- Dedan, Tema, and Buz (eastward tribes in northern Arabia)

- Arabia (due east of Judah)
- Zimri, Elam, and Media (east of Babylon)

There is a definite geographic pattern in the presentation of this material. *“Kings of the north, near and far, one after the other — all the kingdoms on the face of the earth . . .”* including Sheshach (Babylon) were going to be punished (Jeremiah 25:25–26).

In Jeremiah 25:30–38 God is presented in four different ways, describing His complete sovereignty:

“The LORD will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth. The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the LORD will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword,” declares the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth.’ At that time those slain by the LORD will be everywhere — from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground. Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come; you will fall and be shattered like fine pottery. The shepherds will have nowhere to flee, the leaders of the flock no place to escape. Hear the cry of the shepherds, the wailing of the leaders of the flock, for the LORD is destroying their pasture. The peaceful meadows will be laid waste because of the fierce anger of the LORD. Like a lion he will leave his lair, and their land will become desolate because of

the sword of the oppressor and because of the LORD's fierce anger."

The "*LORD*" is presented as a lion ready to pounce upon the defenseless. He is like one who is treading out grapes. The picture is of one up over the grapes and shouting out a victory in the work that has been done. He is like a prosecutor who indicts the guilty. The judgment will be determined by God. He is like a judge declaring the verdict when the case is settled. He would also determine the punishment.

Notice at the end of Jeremiah 25 it seems that God returns to talk to His own people referring to the shepherds and the leaders of the flock beginning in Jeremiah 25:34. God talked about the trials that would beset them. There are five stages to the timetable of tragedy for His people:

- Their protection would be gone. When the nation tried to flee, they would not succeed.
- Their protectors would be gone. The shepherds and the masters of the flock were weeping and wailing in their own fear.
- The pasture to sustain the people would be gone. It had been destroyed because of the anger of the LORD.
- Peace would be gone.
- God's providential care would be gone.

The Prophet on Trial Between Truth and Traitors

In the beginning of the days of Jehoiakim, God called for Jeremiah to deliver a sermon in the court of the LORD's house (Jeremiah 26:1–4). Notice that God instructed Jeremiah, "*Tell them everything I command you; do not **omit** a word*" (Jeremiah 26:2). It is important to consider the ways people abuse the Word of God. The Hebrew word is *gârá*. Consider

these definitions of this word taken from Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon.²⁵

- **Deface**, scratch, scrape, — to cut out part of, out of context usage in the application; Satan saying, “*you will not surely die*” to Eve in the Garden of Eden is an example of this (cf. Genesis 3:3).
- **Deny** or withhold the truth — not speaking the truth; Paul told the people they ought to be teaching, but they were not (cf. Hebrews 5:11–12).
- **Deceive**, take it in — to intentionally mislead people; Jesus said:

“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39–40).

These people were looking at the Word and handling it in such a way as to miss the Son of God Himself.

- **Delay**, lay it up — put off using the truth; Felix, the governor, to whom Paul went repeatedly, even though he was stricken with fear as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and judgment to come, he said, “*When I find it convenient, I will send for you*” (Acts 24:25). He avoided the Word of God, laid it up, and delayed to do anything with it.
- **Decisions made selfishly** — making selfish goals, put it in store just for self; individuals are described in this condition in 2 Peter 2:12–19.

²⁵ Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux, Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon, WM B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1967, p. 180–181.

- **Draw in**, make less of — to take God's Word lightly; people treated God's Word lightly in Jeremiah 23:30–39 when they laughed and asked, "*What oracle?*"

There are many ways men have and continue to diminish the Word of God. That is why God told Jeremiah not to omit a single word.

After Jeremiah delivered God's message to the people, ". . . *the priests, the prophets and all the people seized him and said, 'You must die!'*" (Jeremiah 26:8). This is one of the few times that an audience had been united before Jeremiah:

But as soon as Jeremiah finished telling all the people everything the LORD had commanded him to say . . . all the people seized him . . . all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the LORD (Jeremiah 26:8–9).

The sentence was given concerning Jeremiah. But what followed was one of Jeremiah's finest hours. He stood before all the people knowing they had just sentenced him to death. Physically, he did not have a chance to live one more day. Notice what he said:

. . . "***The LORD sent me*** to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing" (Jeremiah 26:12–15).

Jeremiah told all the people standing before him that they were not dealing with him, they were dealing with God. He did not back down from his message telling them if they obeyed then they would be spared. He knew they could do whatever they pleased with him, but that would not change the truth he had taught. He told the people that if he was executed they would be guilty of shedding innocent blood.

Maybe it was because Jeremiah boldly stood against the people even with a death threat hanging over his head and clearly stated God's message, but whatever the reason, the people changed their minds and decided there would be no death sentence for the prophet. The reason they gave for not killing Jeremiah was ". . . *He has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God*" (Jeremiah 26:16). At this point in his prophetic life, Jeremiah had been waiting for twenty years for the people to respect his message as one from God. At least he heard it this one time.

In Jeremiah 26:17–19 gave him another opportunity, but there were others who still called for his death. They gave the example Jehoiakim during his day and the prophet Uriah who fled to Egypt. He was struck down by the sword and his body buried with the common people. The summary statement for this conflict between two groups of people said: "*Furthermore, Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah, and so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death*" (Jeremiah 26:24). God's providence allowed Jeremiah to move away from the mob who wanted to kill him. He was allowed to stand and preach another day for God.

The Years of the Yoke of Babylon

Jeremiah 27:1–22 contains the announcement against the false prophets, but the significant figures in this passage of scripture are not the false prophets; the "*LORD Almighty, the*

God of Israel” is the central figure in Jeremiah 27. Notice the different references to God in this chapter:

- The sovereignty of God is declared as “. . . *the LORD Almighty*” or “*LORD of Hosts*” (Jeremiah 27:4, 18, 19, 21).
- He is referred to as “*LORD*” (sixteen different times).
- “*I*” (used 11 times) and “*My*” (used 5 times) referring to God.

God is spoken of and His sovereignty declared thirty-six times in twenty-two verses. That is the core of these verses. God’s dominance is mentioned in this regard. Other nations are mentioned along with Judah, but all of these nations were going to soon be under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar.

Four key factors describe God in Jeremiah 27:1–11:

- The **Maker** of heaven and earth (cf. Jeremiah 27:5).
- The **Master** ruling over Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jeremiah 27:6–7).
- The **Mission** of God and His goal was revealed saying that these nations would be subjected to Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 27:8–10).
- The **Mercy** of God is seen when He said, “*If any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and live there*” (Jeremiah 27:11).

The final portions of Jeremiah 27 include a warning to King Zedekiah and a warning to the priests and all the people.

Jeremiah is pictured in Jeremiah 27–28 as one wearing a yoke. This is the yoke of Babylon. The emphasis is that God is sovereign over men, false prophets, and all the nations. God said:

“Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah. Give them a message for their masters and say, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Tell this to your masters: With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please. Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him. All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him”’” (Jeremiah 27:2–6).

A Lying Prophet, Letters to and Return of the Remnant

Jeremiah 28–30

Introduction

Jeremiah 28 is a continuation of Jeremiah 27 within the same time sequence: *“In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah . . .”* (Jeremiah 28:1). Remember from Jeremiah 27:5–7 that God intended for Judah and other nations listed to be under the charge of King Nebuchadnezzar not only through his lifetime, but also through his son and his grandson. I would suggest that students look at the summary of Nebuchadnezzar’s lineage and lifetime given by Merrill C. Tenney in Zondervan’s Pictorial Bible Dictionary.²⁶

The message in Jeremiah 27–29 is an offshoot from Jeremiah 24 and the parable of the good and bad figs. The bad figs were so rotten they could not be eaten. These chapters enlarge upon the message as God was cleansing the corruption from the very bad figs. Jeremiah 29 will also include a picture of the good figs as God began to nurture, guide, and train the individuals who were in captivity to prepare them for a return out of captivity.

²⁶ Tenney, Merrill C., Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1968, p. 104, 264, 569.

**A Lying Prophet, Letters to and
Return of the Remnant**

- I. A Lying Prophet Loses Before the LORD** (Jeremiah 28)
 - A. The Rebel Prophet's Message (28:1–4)
 - B. The Response by Jeremiah (28:5–9)
 - C. The Reaction by Hananiah (28:12–17)
 - D. The Results of Rebellion (28:12–17)
 - E. The Price to Pay for Falsifying the Facts (28:17)
- II. Correspondence Related to the Captives** (Jeremiah 29)
 - A. Plan to Restore His People — Correspondence to the Captives (Jeremiah 29)
 - B. The Recipients of the Letter (29:1–3)
 - C. Plans for the Present (29:4–7)
 - D. Promises for the Future (29:8–15)
 - E. Perils for the People Left Behind (29:16–19)
 - F. Perils for False Prophets Among the Exiles (29:21–32)
- III. A Return of the Remnant** (Jeremiah 30)
 - A. A Written Reminder (30:1–3)
 - B. Present Perils Will Pass (30:4–11)
 - C. God's Providence in the Midst of Man's Pollution and Plunder (30:12–17)
 - D. The Promised Return Does Not Rule Out Chastening (30:12–17)
 - E. The Promises of Glory Restored (30:18–22)
 - F. The Perception of God's Plan and Performance (30:23–24)

A Lying Prophet Loses Before the LORD

Jeremiah 28 begins with the message of one of the rebel prophets, "*Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon.*" In

Jeremiah 28:1–4 he told four bold lies “. . . *in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people*”:

“This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the LORD’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon’” (Jeremiah 28:2–4).

Hananiah told Jeremiah that God had told him *“I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”* That was a blunt lie in contrast to what Jeremiah had said in Jeremiah 25:11–12, 27:7 telling the people that *“all nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.”* He also said that all the vessels that had been taken out of the temple would be returned in two years. That was a direct lie considering what Jeremiah had said in Jeremiah 27:21–22 when he said more things were to be taken to Babylon. Hananiah also said God was going to return Jeconiah to Judah. That was a direct contradiction to what Jeremiah had stated in Jeremiah 22:24–30 declaring that Jeconiah would die in Babylon. Hananiah also said there would be a return of all the other exiles to Judah after two years even though Jeremiah had repeatedly stated that their return would be after seventy years (cf. Jeremiah 25:11–12, 27:7).

Jeremiah’s response to Hananiah is found in Jeremiah 28:5–9. It is interesting that Jeremiah presented what he would have liked to hear so in regard to what Hananiah said about a

quick return, Jeremiah said, “*Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied . . .*” What he meant was that he too wished all the problems could be corrected, but he knew that what Judah needed was going to take longer than two years. Thus Jeremiah declared that his prophesy about the years was no different from other prophets who had also prophesied against many lands, against great kingdoms, and of war, calamity, and pestilence (cf. Jeremiah 28:8). Elijah was such a prophet when he prophesied against Ahab (cf. 1 Kings 21:21–24). Joel and Amos are also examples of prophets who prophesied against kingdoms and warned of disasters to come (cf. Joel 1:1–20; Amos 1–3). Basically Jeremiah was saying he was following a pattern that others had followed. That was his justification and, in a way, he was asking Hananiah where his own justification was.

Jeremiah had established his own credibility over these past twenty plus years of prophetic work. He had said that a force would come from the north and it did. He had said that the people were going to face a famine and they did. He had said that war was going to come and it came. He had also said that some were going into captivity and they had gone. Consequently by the test for a prophet being true only when what he had prophesied had come to pass, Jeremiah had his verification for his prophecies (cf. Deuteronomy 18:21–22).

In Jeremiah 28:10–11 Hananiah reacted and those reactions brought about the results of the rebellion in Jeremiah 28:12–17. When someone does not have an argument, they will put on an act. When he is downed in discussion, then he will demonstrate. That was exactly what Hananiah did. God had told Jeremiah to put on a yoke, so he did and he was still wearing it (cf. Jeremiah 27:2). Hananiah walked up, took the yoke off of Jeremiah’s neck, and broke it. He said, “*This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations*

within two years'” (Jeremiah 28:11). He was mocking the prophet Jeremiah, whose reaction was interesting. There is no indication that he said a word or did anything. He was humiliated and disgraced before all the people, but “. . . *At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way*” (Jeremiah 28:11). There is a great lesson from Jeremiah in this: when you do not have a message from God, sometimes it is best to just be silent.

Jeremiah returned later with a definite message from God for Hananiah:

“Go and tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the LORD says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.’” Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, “Listen, Hananiah! The LORD has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the LORD says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the LORD.’” In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died (Jeremiah 28:13–17).

Jeremiah delivered a message that revealed the true conditions ahead for Judah and the other nations as he clarified the mistakes that Hananiah had declared. He leveled three indictments against Hananiah:

- Hananiah was an imposter. He said “God said,” but he was lying to the people.

- Hananiah caused the people to trust in a lie. He delivered a lie and some of the people trusted in his lies.
- Hananiah spoke in rebellion against the LORD.

As a result of Hananiah's lies, God pronounced his approaching death, declaring that he was doomed. It is interesting that the scriptures record his first lies in the fifth month of the fourth year in the reign of Zedekiah. Jeremiah 28:17 records his death "*in the seventh month of that same year.*" The price Hananiah paid for falsifying the facts were his own death and a trip to the mortuary. The message is that men should never abuse God's message or pretend that He said something when He did not. Hananiah paid for his lies with his life.

Correspondence Related to the Captives

Approximately 20,000 Jews had gone into captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah 29:1–3 relates the fact that a letter from Jeremiah was addressed to "*. . . the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people.*" God sent His message through two different individuals: "*He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiah.*" Remember in Jeremiah 26:24 "*Ahikam son of Shaphan*" was the one who protected Jeremiah so that he was not put to death. Shaphan was also a prominent person in the days of King Josiah being involved with the discovery of the Word of God and some of the restoration efforts (cf. 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34). The other person who was entrusted with taking the message Jeremiah had written to the captives in Babylon was Gemariah son of Hilkiah. Hilkiah was the high priest and also the father of Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 1:1), making it possible that Gemariah was the brother of Jeremiah. These

two men were entrusted with carrying a fabulous message to the captives in Babylon.

Note the plans God had in mind for His people. These five points are excellent to follow for anyone going into a strange land or culture:

- **Resume life:** *“Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat what they produce”* (Jeremiah 29:5). God was basically trying to reassure the people of Judah that most of them would have a stable life in captivity. That may not have been true for everyone, but remember that men like Daniel, Elijah, Meshach, Abednego, and Shadrach even became prominent men in government circles in foreign lands. Live among the people.
- **Replenish the loss of life:** *“Increase in number there; do not decrease”* (Jeremiah 29:6).
- **Respect the captors.:** *“... seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile”* (Jeremiah 28:7). God wanted His people to seek the welfare of the people in the place where they were.
- **Respect the Creator:** *“Pray to the LORD for it . . . ”* (Jeremiah 29:7). Pray to God and pray for the people of the land.
- **Rewards** for responding to God’s requests: By seeking peace in and welfare for Babylon, God promised the exiles they would find peace and gain welfare: *“... because if it prospers, you too will prosper”* (Jeremiah 29:7).

God was simply nurturing His children along, preparing them even in captivity for the return to their homeland. God warned them about false prophets and diviners who would deceive them. These influences needed to be avoided.

God’s message contained promises for the future of the nation of Judah. His message dealt with the kind of heart and

disposition God wanted His people to have when they returned to the land. Notice the desire, the disposition, and the determination they needed:

This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you . . . plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you . . . and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you . . . and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile” (Jeremiah 29:10–14).

The desire God wanted the people to have was “*you will call upon me.*” God wanted them to keep in touch with Him. The disposition God wanted the people to have was “*you will pray to me and I will listen to you.*” They were to petition God. There was to be determination involved: “*you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*” The people of Judah needed to be hungry for a relationship with a Holy God. Man needs to make an attempt to get close to God. God was calling His people to have a devotion to Him. He wanted them to seek and search for Him “*with all your heart.*” Truly God was preparing these people for a better day.

The letter in Jeremiah 29 was written to the exiles in Babylon. God mentioned some of the perils they had left behind in Jeremiah 29:16–19. Some of the exiles may have been depressed about being in captivity and being away from home. God assured them that the people who were left behind

were suffering in terrifying conditions. God explained why the people in captivity were in a better situation than the people who had been left in Judah: *“For they have not listened to my words . . . words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets”* (Jeremiah 29:19).

Notice that in Jeremiah 29:19 as God spoke through Jeremiah’s writings to the exiles in Babylon that He first spoke in third person concerning the people left in Judah: *“they . . . them.”* But then God changed from third person and began talking to the exiles themselves: *“And you exiles have not listened either . . .”* The people in exile had the same problem as the people who had been left in Judah — they also needed to listen to God’s Word.

The cleansing of the corruption and the perils of being a false prophet among God’s people are found in Jeremiah 29:21–32. There are probably some people who would wish that their names had never been put in the Bible. Two of those people might be Ahab and Zedekiah. God made a threefold accusation against these two men. They prophesied falsely in God’s name. They acted foolishly in Israel. They committed adultery with their neighbor’s wives. For these three violations there were going to be three stages of punishment: King Nebuchadnezzar was going to slay these two men before the eyes of the exiles. Imagine being killed before the people whom you had spent your life lying to. The names of these two men were going to be related to a curse. People would swear in days to come: *“The LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.”* They were going to be roasted in the fire. What a horrifying way to die.

One other false prophet received his death notice in Jeremiah 29:24–32. Shemaiah the Nehelamite in captivity sent a letter to Zephaniah the priest back in Judah wanting him to carry out actions like what Jehoiada had accomplished when he executed the idolatrous prophets (cf. 2 Kings 11:1–20).

Shemaiah wanted Zephaniah to instigate things in Judah to deal with “*any madman who acts like a prophet*” wanting him to put them in stocks and neck-irons. Shemaiah was really focusing on one person, the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah’s influence among the exiles concerning the message he had sent to the people in exile was bothering Shemaiah so he sent a letter to Zephaniah back in Judah. God knew Shemaiah’s plan:

Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: “Send this message to all the exiles: ‘This is what the LORD says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I did not send him, and has led you to believe a lie, this is what the LORD says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the LORD, because he has preached rebellion against me’” (Jeremiah 29:30–32).

Shemaiah and his descendants were going to be punished because he had made the people of Judah trust in a lie. The people believed what he was saying. He had also preached rebellion against the LORD. Because of these two charges against Shemaiah, God promised that he would die. God was cleansing the region of the corruption that was on every hand.

A Return of the Remnant

Generally Jeremiah 30–33 is grouped together and called the Book of Consolation. It is the most positive and tremendous material of all the fifty-two chapters. F. Cawley in his work on Jeremiah in The New Bible Commentary calls this section “a

little, great, green oasis in a dry and barren desert.”²⁷ The dry and barren desert is probably identified in Jeremiah 32:1 where there is a time element given “*in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah*” who was the last king of Judah. This would have been the time period of the big eighteen-month siege of Jerusalem and Judah from the forces of Babylon. It was during this time that the positive pronouncements were made.

Notice in Jeremiah 30:1–3 that God wanted the words given to Jeremiah written down as a reminder. When something is written down it is there to be reread, to reassure and reaffirm. God wanted the people to dwell deeply in these promises. God wanted to reassure and reaffirm that their present perils were going to pass. There were going to be days of distress (cf. Jeremiah 30:4–7), but those days would be followed by the days of deliverance (cf. Jeremiah 30:8–11). Jeremiah 30:7 records this as “*a time of trouble for Jacob.*” James E. Smith in his commentary, Jeremiah and Lamentations, relates this to the time when the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into Assyrian captivity as the beginning of the days of Jacob’s distress.²⁸ The very worst of the days of distress would have been during the eighteen-month siege of King Nebuchadnezzar as the nation went through their final stages of desolation.

The days of deliverance will contain three promises seen in Jeremiah 30:8–11. Judah will have a return, a rest, and a relief:

“So do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel,” declares the LORD. ‘I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and

²⁷ Cawley, F., “Jeremiah,” The New Bible Commentary, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954, p. 626.

²⁸ Smith, James E. Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984.

security, and no one will make him afraid. I am with you and will save you . . . Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished” (Jeremiah 30:10–11).

They will have a return and a rest, they “*. . . shall be in rest and be quiet*” (KJV). They will have “*peace and security.*” Remember where these people were when these promises were delivered. Remember where they had been. These people had gone on a three to four hundred mile walk into captivity. How amazing to have a message delivered that offered “*rest*” to them! They would be at ease, relief will come because there would be no king, no judge, and no army to disturb their day.

Notice the final promise of “*For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee . . .*” (Jeremiah 30:11, KJV). It is easy to just read that verse and not grasp it all. Consider this piece by piece:

- “*I am . . .*” — Creator. Think back to Exodus 3:14 when God said that was His name: “*I am who I am.*”
- “*with thee . . .*” — Companionship.
- “*saith the LORD . . .*” — Certain. This is not an unfounded promise. It is a certainty because “*the LORD*” has said it.
- “*to save . . .*” — Comforting.
- “*thee . . .*” — Condemned. God promised to save the condemned people of that generation. God offered the people of Judah this promise and hope.

God’s Providence in the Midst of Man’s Pollution and Plunder

God does deal with reality. In Jeremiah 30:11 God said, “*I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go*

entirely unpunished.” God’s patience is great, but His justice is real. In Jeremiah 30:12–17 God gave three problems that demanded that this generation be punished. First no medicine could cure their carnal, corrupt condition: *“Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.”* Second there will be no memory of them by their alliances and neighboring nations would not be able to give them any relief: *“All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you.”* Third there will be no mercy extended amidst the incurable pain. It hurts when there is no relief, no mercy, and no anesthetic for their agony: *“Because of your great guilt and many sins I have done these things to you.”*

God was going to punish His people for their sins. God did assure them that those who were punishing them would also be punished. Notice that in Jeremiah 30:17 there is a ray of hope and God’s goodness: *“‘But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,’ declares the LORD, ‘because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares’”*

Jeremiah 30:18–22 is a fabulous section revealing the glory that was going to be revealed to these people. Glory was going to be restored in material matters: *“I will restore the fortunes of Jacob’s tents and have compassion on his dwellings.”* It is interesting that the King James Version uses the phrase *“I will bring again the captivity of Jacob’s tents.”* The same Hebrew word is used in Job 42:10 when God said, *“And the LORD turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends . . .”* and Job had twice as much as he had before.

God also assured the people that glory would be restored in *“songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing.”* There was going to be thanksgivings boiling up inside of them causing an overflow of merrymaking on the outside. Glory was going to be restored in men: *“I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they*

will not be disdained.” Glory was going to be restored in the number of men and in the nature of men.

Glory was going to be restored in family, fruitfulness and favor: *“Their children will be as in days of old, and their community will be established before me; I will punish all who oppress them.”* Children were going to be firm and solid, strong and upright. They will have great group gatherings. This would really be a blessing to those who had been scattered and away from loved ones. Glory was going to be restored in providential protection. No one would be harassing these people any longer. Glory was going to be restored in governmental leadership: *“Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them.”* The nation of Judah was going to be blessed with people who had good commendable character, proper for leading.

The climax to it all was going to be the fact that glory was going to be restored with their maker:

“I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me? . . . So you will be my people and I will be your God.”

There is a difference in saying “LORD, LORD” and in being able to say “My LORD and my God.” Keep your eyes on the glory that God can give to a people in captivity.

God closed out this section with a touch of what He has to do, but knowing the people will understand why He does it:

See, the storm of the LORD will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his

heart. In days to come you will understand this
(Jeremiah 30:23–24).

God said His wrath would go forth whenever necessary to any country or clan. God's eyes watch all the earth. His anger will not turn back until He has accomplished the intent of His heart. The primary thought of these two verses is the concept that in the later days, the people will understand what God has done. He had to do it. He had no choice. When the people understand, then He will be justified in the eyes of men. Man needs to be justified in God's eyes, but in His love and goodness He wants man to understand why He does what He does.

Restoration, Redemption, and Assurance

Jeremiah 31–32

Introduction

Jeremiah 31 begins with these words from God: *“At that time . . . I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people.”* The phrase *“at that time”* connects Jeremiah 31 with the discussion that began in Jeremiah 30:3 when God said, *“The days are coming . . . when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess . . .”* referring to a time of restoration. God used the phrase *“all the clans/families of Israel”* which clearly identifies God’s children as Israel and Judah together (cf. Jeremiah 30:3, 31:27). *“All the families of God”* are included in these chapters when God was talking about the restoration and redemption for His people. He was talking about a time in the future, *“in that day”* and *“at that time.”* Notice the following outline:

Restoration, Redemption, and Assurance

- I. **Restoration and Redemption (Jeremiah 31)**
 - A. The Past With a Promise (31:1–9)
 - B. A Preview of Pleasantness (31:10–14)
 - C. Penitence Makes Possible a Return (31:15–22)
 - D. Perception of the Promise Is Sweet (23–30)

- E. Prophetic Pronouncement Concerning the New Covenant (31:31–34)
- F. Proof for These Promises (31:35–40)
- II. **Purchasing Property in Troubled Times** (Jeremiah 32)
 - A. Troubled Times (32:1–5)
 - B. The Purchase of a Field (32:6–15)
 - C. The Prophet's Prayer — A Tribute to God (32:16–25)
 - D. The Plan of God — Present and Future (32:26–44)

Restoration and Redemption

The promises of God are undergirded with His love. Notice that Jeremiah 31:1–9 covers a **past with a promise** for God's people. The setting for this chapter is the **past** that was referred to in Jeremiah 31:2: *"The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel."* The King James Version translates this ". . . found grace in the wilderness." This **past** obviously relates back to the time when God delivered His people out of Egyptian bondage and they came through the "*wilderness*" into the Promised Land. Basically God was blending the facts that as He had once delivered His people out of Egypt, He will one day also deliver His people out of Babylon. These first nine verses from Jeremiah 31 contain one of the most fabulous presentations of the nature of God's love found in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

The nature of God's love is sixfold beginning with the fact that **God's love is everlasting**. God said, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love . . ."* (Jeremiah 31:3). The emphasis can be put on different words in this phrase to make several different points:

- “*I have loved you . . .*” — “**I**” refers to Jehovah God, the Ruler of the universe. He has a special brand of love. Not only is it everlasting, but the very nature of God’s love is tremendous.
- “*I have loved you . . .*” — “**You**” refers to the very people who had rebelled against God even though He worked patiently to try to get them to be what they ought to be.
- God said “*I have loved you with an **everlasting love.***” God’s love has no beginning and no end. I like the statement recorded by G. Campbell Morgan in Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah: “How canst thou think so well of us, yet be the God thou art, is darkness to my intellect, but sunshine to my heart.”²⁹ Such is the everlasting nature of God’s love which should thrill every man.

God’s love is **elevating**. God said, “*I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful*” (Jeremiah 31:4). God has been in the building business with people for many years. God develops His children, adorns them, gives them dignity before others, and causes them to have joy. That is the building nature of God. Man will be delighted by the results from God’s building process if he will only turn to God’s love.

God’s love is **enriching**: “*Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit*” (Jeremiah 31:5). Good things will become common in the land with planting and being able to eat the produce. There will be an ample supply of the very best.

God’s love is **enticing**: “*There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim, ‘Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God’*” (Jeremiah 31:6). The

²⁹ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1966, p.166.

watchmen will direct Israel to go to the right place, to Zion, as the Israelites thought of it in that day. They would go to the LORD their God, who is the right person. Man needs to have a heart that is touched by the nature of God's love. 1 John 4:19 needs to live in everyone's heart: *"We love because he first loved us."*

God's love is **enrapturing** and **worthy to be evangelized**: *"Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'O LORD, save your people, the remnant of Israel'"* (Jeremiah 31:7). Emphasis needs to be on the word *"shout"* in this verse. Anytime the word *"shout"* is used in the context of worship, the attitude and disposition of the person who is participating is not morbid or any kind of meaningless mumbling out of the mouth of brethren. It is a heartfelt and exciting kind of worship filled with gratitude toward God .

God's love is **ennobling**:

"See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return. They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son" (Jeremiah 31:8–9).

All people, *"a great throng will return,"* including the blind, the lame, expectant mothers, and women in labor are going to be cared for, too, because God's love all of them. God gives four different ways in which He will enrich, bless, and ennoble the lives of even the lowliest people:

- Everyone is **dependent** upon God: “. . . *it is not for man to direct his steps*” (Jeremiah 10:23). Notice that God “. . . *will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble . . .*” (Jeremiah 31:9). Man needs God to lead him.
- These people were going to become **determined**. God stated: “. . . *I will cause them to walk . . .*” (Jeremiah 31:9). There was a picture of despondency, wanting to sit down on the side lines, and quit, just give up, but God was going to “*cause them to walk,*” because He loved mankind.
- These people were going to be **directed**. Not only would they be determined, they were going to be directed by God: “. . . *I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path . . .*” (Jeremiah 31:9). God was going to lead them where they needed to be to become whom they needed to be: “*I will cause them to walk . . . in a straight way . . .*” (Jeremiah 31:9, KJV). From faltering and falling, God’s people would move forward through faith directed by God into victory. God makes that kind of a difference in man’s life.
- These people belonged to **Divinity**: “*I am Israel’s father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son*” (Jeremiah 31:9).

The message in Jeremiah 31:8–9 is that God takes the blind, the lame, the orphan, the mother and her child and pours His love out on everyone. This is a great tribute to God’s love.

Beginning in Jeremiah 31:10–14 there is a preview of pleasantness that goes even beyond the nature of God’s love. Consider these verses:

“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: ‘He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a

shepherd.’ For the LORD will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they. They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD — the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more. Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 31:10–14).

The people who had been scattered by God would one day be gathered home again by God. It is not just the fact that they will get home, God said He would watch over them like a good shepherd who cares for the sheep. The scene is one of a shepherd and His sheep. There were four different ways God was going to bless His people:

- God will bless the people materially: “*... they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD — the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds*” (Jeremiah 31:12).
- God will bless the people personally: “*They will be like a well-watered garden and they will sorrow no more*” (Jeremiah 32:12). He was going to give them a healthy, vigorous life. Jesus said, “*Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). The word for “live” is akin to the Hebrew term used here to refer to a full, vigorous, vibrant living. They were not going to simply exist.

- God will bless the people socially: *“Then the maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness. I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow”* (Jeremiah 31:13). He will bless them with joy and comfort, all of the good ingredients that would be supreme.
- God will bless them spiritually: *“I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty”* (Jeremiah 31:14). The priests’ souls would be filled with abundance. The priests were the teachers among these people. There is nothing better than being involved in a class setting with a fabulous teacher, who is truly abundantly prepared, having one’s own soul and spirit fed.

That is how God was going to bless His people.

There was going to be penitence on the part of the people which would make their return possible (cf. Jeremiah 31:15–22). These verses are not written as from God’s standpoint, but from the standpoint of the people. The setting was in a particular place called Ramah, which was granted to the tribe of Benjamin in the days when the land was allotted (cf. Joshua 18:25–28). There is also a particular person mentioned, *“Rachel.”* Remember that Rachel was Benjamin’s mother (cf. Genesis 35:18–19). In this setting, there is also Rachel’s children and Rachel was weeping for her children and refused to be comforted.

I believe there is a dual fulfillment to this prophetic utterance. Part of the fulfillment was revealed in Matthew 2:16–18 when King Herod came in and slew the male children in an attempt to destroy baby Jesus. This same passage was quoted by Matthew:

“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16–18).

That was part of the fulfillment of this verse, but I think that there has to be more than just the fulfillment in the days when Jesus was born. Notice in Jeremiah 31:16 the LORD said: *“Restrain your voice from weeping . . . they will return from the land of the enemy.”* The babies who were killed in Jesus’ day did not return from any land. The LORD also said, *“Your children will return to their own land”* (Jeremiah 31:17). The babies/children in Matthew 2 could not return to any land. They died. Part of this prophecy must have been fulfilled regarding Rachel’s children during the days of Jeremiah. There was certainly reason for mourning in that day for the tragedies coming upon these people. They will be able to return from all of that (cf. Jeremiah 31:18–20).

Jeremiah 31:19 gives five steps necessary to bring these people back to God. There is probably not as much teaching on repentance in this twenty-first century as is necessary. This verse is a parallel to 2 Corinthians 7:10: *“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”* That can be easily seen in this verse from Jeremiah 31:19: *“After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.”* Notice these points using the New American Standard version of this verse:

- *“I was instructed”* — There was some in-depth study in order that they could see what they needed to see and be what they needed to be.

- “*I was ashamed*” — The people had been too slow to become ashamed. Check back and notice nine times before this their need to be ashamed had been brought up. Not until they went into captivity could they really say, “I was ashamed.”
- “*I was humiliated*” — That was an outgrowth of the shame they felt.
- “*I bore the reproach of my youth*” — The word “*reproach*” basically means to be unwanted and despised. That was how far these people had to be broken before they truly turned back to God.
- “*After I turned back, I repented*” — Repentance is the key to returning back to God. A good parallel to these points can be found in Ezekiel 36:25–33.

It took these five steps for the hearts of Judah to truly be changed and to come back to God.

Take note of God’s delight in directing these people to return to Him in Jeremiah 31:20–21:

“Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns. How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The LORD will create a new thing on earth — a woman will surround a man.”

God called His children the “*Virgin Israel*.” They were going to be brought back home to their towns and land. These were the same people who were so evil, so wicked, and so given to idolatry. Certainly this should give man cause to salute God for the ways He can take one at any stage and make him to be what he ought to be.

Pause and consider the phrase “. . . a woman will surround a man” in Jeremiah 31:22. I think this phrase is explained best by considering Galatians 4:4–5:

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

This verse says that God sent His Son, “*born of a woman.*” The King James Version says, “*made of a woman.*” All others had come into this world by a man and a woman, but Jesus alone was “*made of a woman.*” It was a unique birth. He was a unique Boy. He is a unique Savior. The same thought is presented in 1 Timothy 2:15 when Paul said, “*But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*” The verse in Jeremiah presents these same thoughts concerning a new arrangement for God’s people: “. . . for the LORD hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man” (Jeremiah 31:22, KJV).

Jeremiah 31:23–30 covers the perception of the promise that had been given. This promise was very sweet to Jeremiah. It seems that Jeremiah had been in a dream and when he awoke he said his sleep had been pleasant. He was reminded of God’s everlasting love and what He would do for His people in making them “*Virgin Israel*” again.

Beginning in Jeremiah 31:27–40 there is a tremendous list seen in the verses that begin with the word: “*Behold*” (Jeremiah 31:27, 31, 38, KJV). God said:

- “*The days are coming . . . when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals. Just as I watched over them . . . so I will*

watch over them to build and to plant . . .” (Jeremiah 31:27–28).

- *“The time is coming . . . when I will make a new covenant . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people”* (Jeremiah 31:31, 33).
- *“The days are coming . . . when this city will be rebuilt for me . . . the whole valley . . . will be holy to the LORD. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished”* (Jeremiah 31:38–40).

Notice the promise of a “*new covenant*” in Jeremiah 31:31. The “*new covenant*” will have four specific requirements for man in Jeremiah 31:27–40. Notice these verses:

*“The time is coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a **new covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them . . . This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time . . . **I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because **they will all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest . . . For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”* (Jeremiah 31:31–34).

- **Learn the Law!** God said I will put my Law within them, “*in their minds.*”

- **Love the Law!** God said, *“I will . . . write it on their hearts.”* An inward motivation is far superior to an outward compulsion. If man feels he has “got to” go to Bible class, “got to” study the Bible, if there are things he has “got to” do, it is never a very happy experience. God said in the plan He had through this “*new covenant*” and the Law that would be written on their hearts, then man will grasp the Law which is written on his heart and he will love it.
- **Lean on the LORD!** God said *“I will be their God and they will be my people.”* God wants man to come to Him and man needs to come to God because man does not know how to direct his own steps (cf. Jeremiah 10:23). Leaning on God is the only way man can lift himself above the devil’s deception and his efforts to bring man down.
- **Live the Life!** God said, *“. . . they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest . . .”* (Jeremiah 31:34). The key word is the word **“know.”** In Hebrew this word is **yada**. That is the strongest term in the Hebrew language for knowing. It means to perceive, to be acquainted with, and to know by experience. When someone comes to know God, he lives the life of knowing. The plan is to live and work with and for God. Look at 1 Corinthians 3:9 and Ephesians 2:8–10:

*For we are God’s fellow **workers**; you are God’s field, God’s building.*

*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s **workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus to do **good works**, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Coming to **know** God is a working arrangement. Thus those grand charges of learning and loving the Law, leaning on the LORD, and living a life for Him by knowing Him is a part of what it means to enter into this “*new covenant*.”

God has some precious promises with this “*new covenant*.” Notice Jeremiah 31:34: “*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.*” The sins of Judah were going to be forgiven and forgotten. I remember reading an article by Sister Armstrong in the 20th Century Christian years ago. Her husband was one of the great teachers for many years at Harding College. After fifty years of marriage, she wrote, “I do not remember that we ever had an argument.” I thought, “Sister Armstrong, don’t write like that. It couldn’t have been that good.” But then I caught the word “remember.” Such is the nature of God that He does not remember our sins. He loves and blesses mankind, forgives his sins, and then even forgets them. That is the reason the nation of Judah could become the “*Virgin Israel*” again.

The outpouring of blessings in this chapter were such that it seems God anticipates that man would find it hard to believe. Jeremiah 31:35–40 contains God’s proof for His promises:

This is what the LORD says, “He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the LORD Almighty is his name: Only if these decrees vanish from my sight . . . will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me . . . Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done The days are coming . . . when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah. The whole valley where dead bodies and

ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the LORD. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished.”

As certain as it is that the sun, moon, and stars are fixed in the sky, and man can count on those day and night, that is how certain are the promises from God. He will do all that He has promised.

Jeremiah 31:40 says, “. . . *The city will never again be uprooted or demolished.*” The King James Version translates this as: “. . . *it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more **for ever.***” The word “*for ever*” is the Hebrew term **`owlaam** which basically means age-lasting, and through out the ages. It is not equivalent to the Greek term **aioónion** which means eternal. This does not mean that these people would never be over thrown. After they came out of captivity and rebuilt the temple, it was still standing when Jesus came. Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses and closed out the Old Testament era. The promise is a great one and it is right and true. But after they rebelled against God and crucified God’s son, then Jerusalem and the temple were toppled, torn down, and burned in 70 A.D.

Look at the beautiful thought in Jeremiah 31:38–40 concerning what is going to be rebuilt: “*The days are coming . . . when this city will be rebuilt **for me** . . . will be **holy to the LORD.***” What is going to be rebuilt is going to be for the LORD and holy to the LORD.

Purchasing Property in Troubled Times

Jeremiah 32 contains more evidence that the promises of God are true and they can be relied upon. Remember that this is in the tenth year of King Zedekiah, right at the final stages of the downfall of Judah and Jerusalem. The Babylonian army was encamped outside the city of Jerusalem at this time. Siege

mounds were being prepared. Jeremiah 32:1–5 records the fall of Judah to Babylon. God assured King Zedekiah that he should not even try to flee, but he did anyway, and failed. There was no escape. He was defeated.

It is interesting that in these darkest of days for Judah, God brought on a real estate program. In Jeremiah 32:6–15 under God's direction Jeremiah was called upon to buy a field. There are details about drawing up the deed, putting it in an earthen jar, and setting the clay jar aside, “. . . *so they will last a long time*” (Jeremiah 32:14). This would be equivalent to someone locking his papers in a safety deposit box or a filing cabinet. God wanted this deed to be in a place so that it would be remembered. Why did He want Jeremiah to be so careful when there was a battle going on outside and the city of Jerusalem was about to crumble? Consider Jeremiah 32:15: “*For this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.*” Jeremiah was simply being told to put his money where his mouth had been. God had been saying through Jeremiah that the people were going to return to the land out of captivity. Jeremiah was willing to go out and buy a plot of land where perhaps the Babylonian army was camped. Consequently, this is a confidence factor. Jeremiah's nature was such that when he had trouble with the people or when there was an international invasion, he knew where to go. He would go to God. Notice that Jeremiah 32:16–25 begins: “*After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the LORD . . .*” Consider the grand factors in Jeremiah's prayer:

- God is powerful. He is the maker of heaven and earth. Jeremiah said, “*Nothing is too hard for you*” (Jeremiah 32:17).
- God is passionate. He shows loving kindness to “*thousands*” (cf. Jeremiah 32:18). That is an

understatement. God does not show loving kindness to thousands, He shows His love to millions and billions. That is God's great love.

- God is punitive. God brings “*. . . the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them*” (Jeremiah 32:18). He is just. That does not mean that the children are born into sin. It is simply stating that wicked parents often live in such a way that it results in wicked children (cf. Ezekiel 16:14).
- God is perceptive: “*Great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve*” (Jeremiah 32:19).
- God is proven. He is proven by the signs and wonders that He has performed that declare His glory: “*You performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt and have continued them to this day . . . and have gained the renown that is still yours*” (Jeremiah 32:20).
- God is protective: “*You brought your people Israel out of Egypt . . .*” (Jeremiah 32:21). He was willing and could save His children from Babylon.
- God would cause the people to prosper: “*You gave them this land . . . flowing with milk and honey*” (Jeremiah 32:22).

The promises were for the obedient, the penalty was promised for the people who were disobedient. Three charges were brought against these people. They did not obey God. They did not walk in His Law. They did nothing that God commanded. The prophetic pronouncements that were presented were becoming a reality. Siege mounds were being erected. The nation of Judah was going to crumble. Jerusalem was going to fall. And yet God told Jeremiah to “*Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed*” (Jeremiah 32:25).

Jeremiah exhibited his great trust in the LORD — He bought the property.

Interwoven into Jeremiah 32 are the goodness and the severity of God (cf. Jeremiah 32:26–44). Judah was delivered into the hands of sword, famine, pestilence, and the horrible things that God allowed. On the other side in this context He gathered His people out of all the countries. Only God could do that because He knew where they all were. He promised to bring them again to the Promised Land. He said:

“They will be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul”
(Jeremiah 32:38–41).

All of these verses showed the goodness of God. The message for people in this twenty-first century is that God is One who takes people who are helpless and gives them hope. Those who are enduring strife and stress, He will give them security. Those who are corrupt, He will cleanse. Those who are depressed, He will bring them delights. The basic message of Jeremiah 32 is “Go ahead, Jeremiah, buy the land and trust in God.”

Prison Prophecies, Defeat, and Desolation

Jeremiah 33–35

Introduction

It is interesting that God's most precious promises and His most stabilizing statements in the entire Book of Jeremiah seem to be given to Jeremiah when he was in prison in the "*courtyard of the guard*." Remember that Jeremiah 30–33 is sometimes called the Books of Compassion. Jeremiah 32:2 says, "*The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.*" The beginning of Jeremiah 33:1 confirms that this is still the same time element: "*While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time.*" It is during this time period that God extended to Jeremiah some of the richest thoughts that are in the Book of Jeremiah as encouragement. After all, the circumstances without were not that encouraging. Consider the outline for these chapters:

Prison Prophecies, Defeat, and Desolation

- I. **Prison Prophecies With Divine Promises (Jeremiah 33)**

- A. A Message of Restoration of God's People to Himself and Prosperity to the Land (33:1–13)
- B. A Message of the Messianic Reign of Righteousness (33:14–26)
- II. **Defeat, Disobedience, and Desolation** (Jeremiah 34)
 - A. The Downfall of Jerusalem and Defeat of King Zedekiah (34:1–7)
 - B. Disobedience and Its Consequences (34:8–22)
 - C. God's Response to Temporary Obedience (34:17–22)
- III. **Fidelity to a Father — The Recabites** (Jeremiah 35)
 - A. The Example of the Recabites (35:1–5)
 - B. Complete Fidelity to a Father's Instructions (35:6–11)
 - C. The Comparison and Contrast of Judah to God (35:12–19)

Prison Prophecies With Divine Promises

The setting, the time, and the circumstance for Jeremiah 33 are not the best. It is not revealed how the message came to Jeremiah; it could have been a dream or a vision. It really is not important to know how the message came, but knowing the message and Who gave it are indeed important. Jeremiah 33:2 says, *“This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it — the LORD is his name.”* It is interesting that God does not really have to check out the visiting hours at a prison. If He wants to visit He can visit anytime He pleases. The significant point may be seen in Jeremiah 33:3. Not only was God able to visit or call upon Jeremiah in these circumstances, but God told Jeremiah that He wanted him to call back upon God: *“‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’”* The reason for this communication might be the

fact that the nation of Judah was in the final stages of its downfall in the days of Zedekiah. Various things were going on inside and on the outside. Many of the King's palaces and prominent places were being torn down and broken up in some way to try to preserve the city of Jerusalem: “. . . *palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword in the fight with the Babylonians.*” On the outside of the city the siege mounds were being built up by Babylon as they were on the verge of breaking through in the final downfall of both the city and the nation. The city was also filled with the corpses of men (cf. Jeremiah 33:5). God, loving His prophet, was trying to keep in touch with Jeremiah in these final hours. God informed Jeremiah that all of this was happening because His anger and His wrath had caused Him to hide His face from these people “*because of all its wickedness.*” Judah had refused to change.

God wanted Jeremiah to see that through this carnage there was a plan underway for cleansing. In Jeremiah 33:6–8 God pointed out that the ultimate goal from this deterioration and destruction that was all around was really for three things to happen on God's part:

- God will redeem the people because He will cleanse them.
- God will refresh and relax the people. This may seem like a small thing because people do not truly realize what it would be like to go through weeks and months of invasion. The Babylonian army was encamped around Jerusalem for eighteen months before their final fall. They must have longed to have just a moment to breathe free air. God wanted them to know that He still cared for His people.
- God will ultimately restore and rebuild the people so that they will come back to that place.

God was trying show Jeremiah that He cared. He was trying to keep Jeremiah's spirits buoyed up during this time.

The great message in all of this is the pattern on God's part. In order for the nation of Judah to gain all of these benefits and blessings, they were going to have to change their lives. God wants His children to first be pure and only then can they have peace. He wants His children to first be holy and only then can they be happy. He wants His children to first be righteous and only then can they rejoice. Mankind needs to do it God's way. That was the promise God was giving Jeremiah and both Judah and Israel:

“Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it” (Jeremiah 33:6–9).

A day was coming when the people of Judah and Israel would be a name of joy, peace, and glory to Him. They would have international respect again.

Jeremiah 33:14–26 covers a glorious and more extended part of God's plan:

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah. In those days and at

*that time I will make a **righteous Branch** sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness'" (Jeremiah 33:14–16).*

This “*righteous Branch . . . from David's line*” is the same as the Messianic Shoot seen in Jeremiah 23:5–6. God was definitely giving the people a Messianic Hope. Judah was going to be saved and Jerusalem would dwell in safety. This is certainly a part of the plan that was given in Luke when the angel came and said:

“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:30–33).

This statement by the angel was the beginning of the great fulfillment of this prophecy given in Jeremiah 33:15–16. God wanted Jeremiah to grasp these things given to him while he was in prison. God wanted His prophet to retain his confidence and hope on the basis of His promises.

In Jeremiah 33:23–26 God came to Jeremiah saying:

“Have you not noticed that these people are saying, ‘The LORD has rejected the two kingdoms he chose’? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation. This is what the LORD says: ‘If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the

fixed laws of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.’”

This was an attempt on God’s part to help Jeremiah believe His promises and then extend it onto the others who would listen. These promises were real. They were as solid as God’s laws of day and night. To assure Jeremiah of His fidelity and faithfulness God went all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Genesis 12. These are the promises that were supplied in Jeremiah 33.

James E. Smith in his commentary Jeremiah and Lamentations states:

It is no doubt to such passages as Jeremiah 33 that Peter refers when he speaks of the prophets as inquiring and searching diligently. What or what matter of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify when it testified before hand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.³⁰

Certainly the glory part is seen in Jeremiah 30–33.

Jeremiah 34–36 seems to go together as a unit in a totally different setting. The primary terms here would be disobedience and obedience. God was trying to get the people to turn to obedience, but He was faced with their disobedience. Once again it is important to know that these units are not in chronological order. Chronologically these three chapters would be set up as Chapter 36, 35, and then 34. Jeremiah 34

³⁰ Smith, James E., Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press-Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 570–571.

comes from the time of the days of Zedekiah (cf. Jeremiah 34:1–11). This chapter is dealing again with the end times of the nation of Judah. God used this method of running ahead to emphasize His points about their disobedience by showing through an illustration in this thirty-fourth chapter that these people were disobedient right down to the final hour even in an area where they obviously knew what to do. They obviously knew what to do because they did obey and then they turned right around and reversed their obedience. God was justifying again the actions He had to take upon them because of their disobedient spirit and nature.

Notice that Jeremiah 34:1–7 covers the downfall of Jerusalem and the defeat of King Zedekiah. There is also a break down of what the people were going to lose during this final siege:

- They will lose the capital city by fire (cf. Jeremiah 34:2). There will be the destruction of the stately, tradition-filled buildings, buildings that had been a part of the history of Israel for centuries.
- King Zedekiah will lose his liberty (cf. Jeremiah 34:3). He will be captured even though he will try to flee and escape. He cannot get away. Zedekiah will forever be known as the man who was forever seeking the easy way out and he never found it.
- King Zedekiah will finally lose his life (cf. Jeremiah 34:5). God told Zedekiah that he was not going to die by the sword or in the battle. He was going to die peacefully. Just as the people had burned spices for his father, they were going to burn spices for King Zedekiah. The people were going to lament their king. This honor was not because of his overall reign. He had been an example of weakness over and over again. Perhaps they honored him with a funeral fire because they had pity for him. It is possible,

but there is no proof, that he did repent in time and try to become what he should have been.

- King Zedekiah was going to lose his kingdom. The scriptures mention that he was going to come eye to eye and face to face with King Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jeremiah 34:3). That had to be an interesting meeting. On one hand there would be a powerful ruler, a great leader, a conquest and conqueror-natured man. In regard to God's people, King Nebuchadnezzar showed more respect for the prophet than King Zedekiah did. On the other hand would have been the sadness and the weakness of Zedekiah. It is not known how long he lived in captivity in his blindness. However long it was, he surely would have relived the follies and the failures and weaknesses of his life.
- King Zedekiah lost the kingdom and the fortified cities in Judah (cf. Jeremiah 34:7).

Jeremiah 34:8–22 covers the disobedience of Judah and the consequences for their disobedience. In these verses there is an illustration which gives the proof that these people knew better. It relates to the background in Exodus 21:1–12 and Leviticus 25:8–10. If for some reason or cause, the Hebrew people were made slaves under their own people, after six years they were to be set free. These people obviously knew that because Jeremiah 34:10–11 says:

“So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free. But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.”

All these Jews obeyed and set their fellow Hebrew people free from their slavery though probably not from a conversion to what God had said or obeying God's law. They did it obviously out of convenience. All the background information is not here in these verses, but these verses drive home the lesson to be careful not only in what a person does, but also why he does it. They did obey the covenant, but afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves. It seems that maybe Pharaoh came from Egypt and gave a reprieve to the problems Judah was facing so that they thought they were not going to be subdued by Babylon and so the circumstances changed (cf. Jeremiah 37:7–11). As soon as that happened, these covetous Hebrew people took the people they had set free and brought them back into slavery again. That is what God did not like. It also raises the question of why they set the slaves free the first time. Maybe it was for the convenience of not having as many mouths to feed in the hard living at that time. Maybe it was because the Babylonian army had been near and they were afraid they were going under so they decided to shape up before they were shipped out. All the background is not recorded, but there is the same nature of these people. They will obey one minute and then disobeyed in the next minute.

Notice in Jeremiah 34:17–22 there is God's response from their temporary obedience. These people had proven themselves once again to be two-faced, not real, and not genuine. God leveled three charges against them and used a bit of satire also:

“Therefore, this is what the LORD says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim ‘freedom’ for you, declares the LORD — ‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth. The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms

of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces. The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. I will hand Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials over to their enemies who seek their lives, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you. I am going to give the order, declares the LORD, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down. And I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there.”

They had released the slaves and then forced them to be slaves again, so God said He was going to release them, but it would be to the “. . . sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth.” God affirmed that there would be slaughter and shame. None of the people were going to be spared. God assured them their surrender to Babylon would be in the form of a burned city and a desolate land. This chapter swings around the shame of a people who knew what they ought to do and would not do it. Have you ever been that way? Have you ever known what you ought to do and then did not do it?

Fidelity to a Father — The Recabites

Jeremiah 35 is a scene of obedience, but it is not the obedience of Judah. There was a conference call from Jeremiah calling the people to come to the temple chambers. The people he called were the Recabites. The Recabites traced themselves

all the way back to a man named Jonadab. The background for these people is in 2 Kings 10:15–31. He was a worshiper of God who teamed up with Jehu's revolution to try to rid Israel of idolatry which had been brought on by King Ahab and his wicked Queen Jezebel. This revolution occurred approximately in 840 B.C. The events in Jeremiah 35 occurred in approximately 600 B.C. That means there was two hundred forty years of influence by this man Jonadab. He was still very influential at this time. He was named seven times and identified by the word "*father*" six times, by the pronoun "*he*" four times, by the pronoun "*his*" two times. He is mentioned nineteen times in the nineteen verses indicating his influence. All of that centers around the fact that Jeremiah called these people to come in for this conference.

After setting up this arranged conference, God told Jeremiah to ". . . *give them wine to drink.*" They refused to drink and that is where the story unfolds of their fabulous record of obedience. Jeremiah 35:6–11 records the fidelity of this family to their forefather's desire, Jonadab son of Recab. Notice what all was still being affected in their lives because of the rules laid down more than two hundred years earlier. This is the story of some beautiful obedience. The idea of obedience has already been brought up approximately sixteen times in the Book of Jeremiah.

When Jeremiah asked the Recabites to drink, they said Jonadab had given the rule not to drink wine. His command affected what they drank:

But they replied, "We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine. Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you

will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.’ We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops. We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us. But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.’ So we have remained in Jerusalem” (Jeremiah 35:6–11).

Notice also **who** was involved in these commands and **when**: “*Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.*” This is not a specific time period, but this “*ever drink wine*” had already lasted two hundred and forty years up to this time. Notice that this command affected where they lived: “. . . *never build houses . . . must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.*” Notice that this command affected how the Recabites were employed: “. . . *you must never . . . sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things . . .*”

This was an interesting statement concerning what they were not to plant. I came across some notes from Smith in his commentary, Jeremiah and Lamentations, that gives some light on why this might have been done. It seems that in that day there were excessive drinking and wild harvest time orgies and parties. Jonadab did not want his relatives involved in any of that. These commands were given so that they would lead a simple life and keep them away from the shame of what was happening in the land all around the idolatry and ungodly worship of Baal.³¹

³¹ Smith, James E., Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 591.

This command from Jonadab also affected whom the Recabites married: “*We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab . . . commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine . . .*” If someone married or was born into this family of the Recabites, they had to follow the rules. This is a tremendous illustration of obedience that God called for Jeremiah to illustrate. Jeremiah was demonstrating this kind of obedience to the others who had gathered at the court temple to see what was going to happen.

Why did the Recabites live in this manner? Notice the following verses which explain the reasons for following Jonadab’s commands:

*“Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. **Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.**’ We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us . . . We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us. But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.’ **So we have remained in Jerusalem**” (Jeremiah 35:7–11).*

This was a survival kit for the followers of Jonadab. It was a plan of complete fidelity to Jonadab’s instructions.

Notice that in Jeremiah 35:12–16 God gave this lesson as a contrast between the followers of Jonadab and how one should obey and how the children of God did not follow His instructions even though they had ONE much greater to follow. They did not listen to God, the Father of Israel. Consequently, the lesson stands out in bold, clear dimensions. God stated the

reason for the problem in the form of a question: “‘*Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?*’” (Jeremiah 35:13).

The Word of God has been given to guide all His children. It was given to guide and take His children where they ought to go and to help them be what they ought to be. Israel of all the people on the earth should have obeyed, but they did not. The Recabites showed a better response of obedience to Jonadab than Judah had shown to God. The conclusion for their disobedience came when God assured Judah that they were going to face disaster:

. . . “Listen! I am going to bring on Judah and on everyone living in Jerusalem every disaster I pronounced against them. I spoke to them, but they did not listen; I called to them, but they did not answer” (Jeremiah 35:17–19).

There is also an obedience factor because God is equally faithful and conscience of obedience. He made a promise to the Recabites:

Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Recabites, “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.’ Therefore, this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me’” (Jeremiah 35:18–19).

There is not a background available to the promise God made to Jonadab, but it is interesting that down through the years in that territory, there have been some things that have held true over all these years. Charles Ellicott in his commentary,

Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible in Volume V gives some information that is interesting:

Benjamin of Tedula in the twelfth century reported that he found a hundred thousand Jews who were named Recabites, who lived after that fashion. They were governed by a prince of the house of David. After that Dr. Wolfe reported in a journal in 1829 and another report in 1839 and another bit of information after that in 1862 that said they had met tribes near Mecca on the Dead Sea and in Yemen and Sennar who observed the rule of Jonadab and claimed to be his descendants and referred to Jeremiah 35:19 as being fulfilled in them and that these people did live the life of devout Jews.³²

It is interesting what illustrations God used to help these people to demonstrate in a forcible way what Judah should have shown to Jehovah God. Such was the example of disobedience in Jeremiah 35.

Notice the units in Jeremiah to help realize more clearly why the Book of Jeremiah is arranged like it is. God did His best to try to help His children be what they ought to be. He is still trying to do that even now in the twenty-first century for YOU and me. May we honor what our father Jehovah God has given and obey His words.

³² Ellicott, Charles J., Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Vol V, 1959, p. 123.

Jeremiah's Strength and Zedekiah's Weakness

Jeremiah 36–38

Introduction

The thirty-sixth chapter of Jeremiah begins during the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah. Remember that particular year has shown up in Jeremiah 25:1, and it will come up again in Jeremiah 45:1 and 46:2. This was the significant year in which the country of Judah first fell to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire. The nation of Judah fell because of their disobedience (cf. Jeremiah 34) under King Zedekiah, the last king. God gave His justification for their punishment as they continued to rebel throughout the final years of the nation. The nation of Judah did not respond to God as the Recabites did by obeying their father, Jonadab. The people of Judah did not obey God. Jeremiah 36 contains God's message of His plan for Jeremiah to record his prophecies from the days of Josiah to this fourth year in the reign of Jehoiakim (cf. Jeremiah 36:1–2, 25:1–3). Notice the outline for these three chapters of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's Strength and Zedekiah's Weakness

- I. **Impact and Preservation of the Prophetic Message**
(Jeremiah 36)
 - A. Setting the Stage for the Sermon (36:1–7)

- B. The Sermon Presented and Its Impact (36:8–26)
 - C. The Sermon Rewritten Plus Planned Punishment for All (36:27–32)
- II. **Payment for Prophesying: Imprisonment** (Jeremiah 37)
 - A. The Problems from These People (37:1–6)
 - B. The Promised Peril for These People (37:7–10)
 - C. The Prophet Imprisoned (37:11–16)
 - D. The Prophet Sought and Providence Supplied (37:17–21)
- III. **The Weak and Vacillating King** (Jeremiah 38)
 - A. The King Submits to Charges Against Jeremiah (38:1–6)
 - B. Zedekiah Responds to Ebed-Melech's Appeal for Jeremiah (38:7–13)
 - C. Zedekiah Counsels with Jeremiah (38:14–23)
 - D. Zedekiah Pleads for Silence from Jeremiah (38:24–28)

Impact and Preservation of the Prophetic Message

Jeremiah 36 contains God's plans from the beginning of Jeremiah's prophetic life to the present day boldly recorded and delivered in a magnificent unfolding of a message nine months in preparation. All preachers might want to tune in on this concerning your sermon preparation.

Notice that the stage is set for the sermon in Jeremiah 36:1–7. The central figure in Jeremiah 36 is Baruch, the recorder of Jeremiah's message and also the one who delivered his message. The reason Baruch had to deliver the message was because Jeremiah was “. . . *restricted; I cannot go to the LORD's temple*” (Jeremiah 36:5). There is a sadness about that, the man, who had tried to prepare the nation of Judah and these

people to honor God and to come to this place of honor, is himself restricted from the LORD's temple even though he is honorable. There are people who want to come to church services and cannot, but also those who do come and wonder why they are there.

The message had been prepared over a period of nine months (cf. Jeremiah 36:1, 9). The message was presented five different times by request. Notice that the audience for the first presentation was “. . . *all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah*” (Jeremiah 36:9) for a time of fasting. The message was read by Baruch from the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary in the upper courtyard at the entrance of the New Gate of the temple. Notice the impact of the words of Jeremiah from the scroll on Micaiah son of Gemariah. Remember Gemariah was the one who took the letter that Jeremiah had prepared in Jeremiah 29 and carried it to Babylon and the exiles. Micaiah was so impressed by the message that —

*He went down to the secretary's room where all the officials were sitting: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Acbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials [these officials included his father]. After **Micaiah told them everything** he had heard . . . (Jeremiah 36:12–13).*

Notice the impact this message had on Micaiah — he was able to tell them “*everything he had heard.*” Any time a person hears a message and can deliver all that was heard, there is either a masterful message or a magnificent memory. It may have been both in this case. The impact on Micaiah was obvious.

As Micaiah delivered the message he had heard Baruch reading from the scroll, there was another obvious impact:

All the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll from which you have read to the people and come." So Baruch son of Neriah went to them with the scroll in his hand. They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them (Jeremiah 36:14–15).

This was now the third presentation of the message that Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch. Notice yet another impact this reading had on the officials: *"When they heard all these words, **they looked at each other in fear . . .**"* (Jeremiah 36:16). The Hebrew word for "fear" is **pachad**. This word actually means to tremble. These men were affected by this message in such a way that it created a move on the inside that caused them to make a move on the outside. They then declared they would—

***". . . report all these words to the king."** Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?" "Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll." Then the officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah, go and hide. Don't let anyone know where you are." After they put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they went to the king in the courtyard and **reported everything to him** (Jeremiah 36:16–20).*

Once again men were able to report "everything." This was the fourth time the message was read or reported on. Whoever heard this message could not get it out of their system. It not

only affected all the officials and the scribes, it also affected the king:

*The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him. It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him. Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire. The king and all his attendants who heard all these words **showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes** (Jeremiah 36:21–24).*

When the king heard the report from the officials, he demanded that he be able to see the scroll. This was the fifth reporting of the words of Jeremiah as he had dictated them to Baruch. The king was certainly affected by this reading as Jehudi read it. The impact of the message on the king was one of destruction. Jeremiah 36:22 says this happened in the ninth month and the king had a fire going in his winter apartment. He took a scribe's knife and cut up the scroll piece by piece and cast it into the fire. He destroyed the entire scroll in this manner.

There is a parallel scripture in Jeremiah 22:13–19, which was the chapter on the kings. Compare that passage with Jeremiah 36:20–26. If that earlier passage was a part of the message in Jeremiah 36, that might explain why Jehoiakim was so upset:

Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. Instead, the king commanded Jerahmeel, a son

of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the LORD had hidden them (Jeremiah 36:25–26).

King Jehoiakim surely intended to kill Jeremiah and Baruch. God's providence protected them from the king. Imagine how these two men must have felt during this time of hiding. Surely they were able to sing with the spirit and the understanding. Perhaps they sang with words like those written by the blind sister, Fanny J. Crosby when she wrote the song, "Hide Me, O My Savior":

"Hide Me, O My Savior"

Hide me, O my Savior, hide me
In Thy holy place;
Resting there beneath Thy glory,
O let me see Thy face.

Hide me, when my heart is breaking
With its weight of woe;
When in tears I seek the comfort
Thou canst alone bestow.³³

If Jeremiah and Baruch were concerned, and surely they had to be, it did not keep Jeremiah from doing what needed to be done. In Jeremiah 36:27–32 God told Jeremiah He wanted the message rewritten (cf. Jeremiah 45). The significant point is that the scroll was not only rewritten, but God added many other words: ". . . *And many similar words were added to*

³³ "Hide Me, O My Savior," Crosby, Fanny J. (w. 1886), *Songs of Faith and Praise*, Editor: Howard, Alton H., Howard Publishing Co. Inc. West Monroe, LA, 1994, p. 841.

them” (Jeremiah 36:32). When man tries to tear down God’s work, it just increases.

God also told Jeremiah that He had a special message for Jehoiakim king of Judah. Jehoiakim must have wondered how Jeremiah knew some of the things that he wrote about when Jeremiah was not even there (cf. Jeremiah 36:29–31). Such is the providence of God and His revelations. God knows where all His children are at all times. God revealed three things to Jeremiah concerning Jehoiakim in particular:

“ . . . ‘This is what the LORD says: You burned that scroll and said, “Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?” Therefore, this is what the LORD says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night. I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened’ ” (Jeremiah 36:29–31).

- None of Jehoiakim’s lineage would sit on David’s throne. Coniah, the son of Jehoiakim, did reign for three months (cf. Jeremiah 22:24–30). God said that he would remove the signet ring from his hand. God never recognized Jehoiachin (Coniah) as king. Nebuchadnezzar was the one who put Coniah on the throne (cf. Jeremiah 37:1).
- Jehoiakim was told that his body would be thrown out and exposed to the heat of the day and the frost at night (cf. Jeremiah 22:18–19). He was going to receive the burial of

a donkey. This prophecy revealed the awful end of an awful king.

- God assured Jehoiakim that all the calamities He had promised for Jerusalem and Judah would be poured forth upon him and his children as well.

Jeremiah 36:31 reveals the reason all of this was going to happen: “*. . . because they have not listened.*” They did not listen! The same thought is delivered in Jeremiah 19:15:

“Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.”

Payment for Prophesying: Imprisonment

The thirty-seventh chapter of Jeremiah actually begins another unit in this study and the scene changes to Nebuchadnezzar setting up Zedekiah as king in the place of Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim (cf. Jeremiah 37:1). The chronology of this chapter has some parallel events in Jeremiah 38 along with pieces from Jeremiah 34 and 21. The bullet chart below may be helpful when studying Jeremiah 37–38 since the chronology of these chapters can sometimes be confusing. The likely sequences of the events are as follows with the date and scripture passages included:

- 588 B.C. 34:1–7 The army of the king of Babylon came in to do the fighting against Jerusalem early in 588 B.C. (vs. 7).
- 588 B.C. 21:1–14 Zedekiah speaking to Jeremiah: *“Please inquire of the LORD . .*

- . *that the enemy may withdraw from us*” (vs 2). This probably happened and gave hope to some in Judah.
- 588 B.C. 37:1–10 Later God spoke: “*Do not deceive yourselves, thinking ‘The Babylonian army will surely leave us.’ They will not!*” (vs. 9). It seems that help from Egypt came allowing for a temporary suspension of the battle between Judah and Babylon.
 - 588 B.C. 34:20–22 God assured Judah: “*I will hand Zedekiah . . . over to the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you . . . I will bring them back to this city . . . lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there*” (vs. 21–22).
 - 588–587 B.C.
Jeremiah 37:17–21 Jeremiah was released from the house of Jonathan and placed in the courtyard of the guard.
 - 587–586 B.C.
Jeremiah 38:1–13, 28 Jeremiah was placed in the cistern, then released and returned to the courtyard of the guard until Jerusalem was captured.

Notice in Jeremiah 37:2 that neither the king, nor his servants, or any of the people “*. . . paid any attention to the words the LORD had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.*”

Jeremiah 37:1–6 covers the problems from the people of Judah, who were very mixed up in their minds. A prophet was supposed to take God's message and bring it down to the people. That is the way it was supposed to be. These people did not listen to the message Jeremiah had delivered and instead they came to Jeremiah and wanted him to go to God for them to tell God what He ought to do. They were very mixed up, very humanistic, and sadly, they were operating in such a way that it was a peril for Jeremiah.

Beginning in Jeremiah 37:7–10 God spoke to Jeremiah telling him the promised peril for the people of Judah:

“This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of me, ‘Pharaoh’s army, which has marched out to support you, will go back to its own land, to Egypt. Then the Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down . . . Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, ‘The Babylonians will surely leave us.’ They will not! Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down.”

The people of Judah sought to team up with Pharaoh Hophra from Egypt as a force against their common enemy King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 44:30). With a bold blast Jeremiah informed these people that no military shift was going to be favorable for them.

There seems to have been a reprieve when Egypt came up and Babylon withdrew for a moment. Jeremiah left the city and went out to the territory of Benjamin to take possession of his share of property there among the people. At that time Jeremiah was arrested and taken to the officials. He was beaten a second

time and put in jail in the house of Jonathan the secretary (cf. Jeremiah 20:2). Look at the statements in Jeremiah 37:11–16. These passages mention their anger and indignation, they beat him as retaliation, then they put him in a dungeon which would be incarceration. They did all of this without any evidence against Jeremiah. They had no justification for what they did. Jeremiah did not beg for pity or mercy. He could have complained and asked why they were doing all of this to him, but he did not. He did not question them to see what they were going to do next. He simply responded as God wanted him to do.

Notice in Jeremiah 37:17–21 King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah, asking him if there was any word from the LORD. Jeremiah simply told the king what he had been telling the people of Judah all along: “*you will be handed over to the king of Babylon*” (Jeremiah 37:17). At that time Jeremiah continued to unfold God’s message as he had done all along, consistent in the message that he gave, courageous in the way he delivered it, and yet considerate in his comments. Notice the appeal he made on his own behalf at this time, illustrating that even a prophet of God has feelings:

“What crime have I committed against you or your officials or this people, that you have put me in prison? Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, ‘The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land’? But now, my lord the king, please listen. Let me bring my petition before you: Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, or I will die there”

Jeremiah challenged the justice of his incarceration. He also challenged the so called “Prophets of Peace” who had declared that Babylon would not attack Jerusalem. Where did these

prophets get their message of peace when the nation of Judah had been in conflict with other nations for so long? Jeremiah respectfully addressed King Zedekiah: *“my lord the king, please listen. Let me bring my petition before you: Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan . . . or I will die there”* (Jeremiah 37:20). Jeremiah's plea resulted in his protection as Zedekiah ordered for Jeremiah to be placed in the courtyard of the guard and given bread from the bakers every day as long as there was bread in the city. He was taken away from the officials who had cried out against him.

This chapter closed out with the trials Jeremiah had faced and the misunderstandings and mixed up thoughts of the people. What they were doing was all in the wrong direction.

The Weak and Vacillating King

There are three personalities in Jeremiah 38. There are Zedekiah, Jeremiah, and Ebed-Melech. King Zedekiah is really the central character. Notice in this study the vacillating way in which Zedekiah ruled as a king. The chapter begins with King Zedekiah submitting to the charges made against Jeremiah by the officials (cf. Jeremiah 38:1–6).

There are four men mentioned specifically as Jeremiah's accusers: Shephatiah, who is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture; Gedaliah son of Pashhur (Pashhur was the one who had Jeremiah beaten the first time in Jeremiah 20); Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah. These four officials told the king that Jeremiah was committing treason trying to get the soldiers to surrender to Babylon. They said he was destroying the strength of the inner structure of Judah and declared him to be a traitor.

Weak, vacillating, lack of courage Zedekiah turned Jeremiah over to these brazen, wicked princes. He should have taken a stand, but instead he said there was nothing he could do.

He lied. He was the king. He just did not do anything. These men “. . . took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king's son, which was in the courtyard of the guard (Jeremiah 38:6). The King James Version and others translate this verse “. . . they took Jeremiah, and cast him into the dungeon . . . that was in the court of the prison . . .” The word “cast” indicates there was not gentle treatment being given with what they were doing to him. They were enraged against Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 38:7–13 is Zedekiah's response to Ebed-Melech's appeal for Jeremiah. Ebed-Melech was a slave from Ethiopia and a eunuch. Generally, he would have been considered a nobody, but as he came face to face with the king, he showed his courage and King Zedekiah showed his cowardice. It seems as if the king responded to whoever came around him with a request. Ebed-Melech brought three charges against the officials:

- “*These men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet*” (Jeremiah 38:9)
- “*They have thrown him into a cistern . . .*” (Jeremiah 38:9)
- “*. . . where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city*” (Jeremiah 38:9). Starving to death in a cistern in the mud would not be a good way to go.

It is possible that Zedekiah did not even know where the officials had taken Jeremiah because he did not follow up very well on anything. King Zedekiah told Ebed-Melech to take thirty men and do what he could to bring Jeremiah out of the cistern. It is interesting that the king sat and the slave was the one who acted. The king commanded action, but he would not do what he ought to do himself. Thus, the weakness of this man is seen throughout the chapter.

Once Ebed-Melech had done his good work and drawn Jeremiah up out of the cistern, Zedekiah counseled with Jeremiah. It is ironic that King Zedekiah said, *"I am going to ask you something . . . Do not hide anything from me"* (Jeremiah 38:14). Jeremiah had not been hiding anything from the king all along. Jeremiah bluntly told the king:

"If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me." But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who are seeking your life." Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live. But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands'" (Jeremiah 38:15–18).

Jeremiah did not have any fear of Zedekiah because there was no strength in the man, but he still showed the king respect at this point and, actually, gave him options. If he surrendered to Babylon his life would be spared as well as the city of Jerusalem and his own family. Those options would have given Zedekiah what would be considered a life time of success for any individual. Instead the very first thing the king did was to vacillate, wondering what the Jews might do to him:

“I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me” (Jeremiah 38:19).

In contrast to the king's worries, Jeremiah said:

“They will not hand you over . . . Obey the LORD by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared. But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon . . .” (Jeremiah 38:20–22).

This is the sad, sad picture of King Zedekiah, looking at whoever was closest to him and wondering what they were going to do. It seems he kept his brain busy trying to figure out what others would say or think.

Notice one more time exactly how King Zedekiah was a failure:

- He failed as a husband because his wives would be taken into Babylon as captives.
- He failed as a father because his children would become captives also and he would watch his sons die before his eyes and before Nebuchadnezzar.
- He failed as a man when he was seized by Babylon's king.
- He failed as a king because the city was going to be burned by fire (cf. Jeremiah 38:23).

King Zedekiah was weak and vacillating. Look at his appeal to Jeremiah, pleading with him to be careful what he said to the officials. He was continually worried about what others might think or feel. It is important for men to be

considerate of others, but there is sadness in the life of this man who would not take a stand. King Zedekiah was consistent. He was consistently weak and wavering.

Think about your own life. Are you one who will take a stand? Or are you one who will sit back in the pew and be silent? Are you one who will speak for God or one who will run from the message of God when you hear it? Christians need to **not** be like King Zedekiah.

Jerusalem Falls and the Remnant

Introduction

Jeremiah 39–42

Jeremiah 39 is a climatic chapter as well as sobering and sublime in the sentences imposed. It gives an interesting blend in punishment and providence unfolding massive bloodshed with individual security. It is a paradox of pulverizing power and providential protection. This chapter primarily centers around three individuals: King Zedekiah and his plight as Jerusalem finally falls to Babylon; Jeremiah and the providential protection given to God's prophet; and Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian eunuch, who became a grand example of one receiving divine care for anyone who would stand for and do what is right. Notice the basic context of these chapters in the following outline:

Jerusalem Falls and the Remnant

- I. **Jerusalem Falls to Babylonian Forces** (Jeremiah 39)
 - A. King Zedekiah's Plight as Jerusalem Falls (39:1–10)
 - B. God's Providential Provisions for His People (39:11–14)
 - C. Divine Interest in Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian Slave (39:15–18)
- II. **Regulations for the Remnant** (Jeremiah 40)
 - A. The Prophet Released and Rewarded (40:1–5)

- B. The Provincial Government Set Up Under Gedaliah (40:6–12)
- C. Problems Prevail Among the Remnant (40:13–16)
- III. **Death and Destruction Continue** (Jeremiah 41)
 - A. A Meal Mixed with Murder (41:1–3)
 - B. The Murder of Mixed-up Mourners (41:4–10)
 - C. Conflict and Concern about Further Captivity (41:11–18)
- IV. **God's Counsel Sought, Received, and Rejected** (Jeremiah 42)
 - A. God's Prophet Urged to Pray and the People Promise to Obey (42:1–6)
 - B. God's Answer Offers Peace or Punishment (42:7–18)
 - C. God's Prophet Pleads and Warns (42:19–22)

Jerusalem Falls to Babylonian Forces

There are nine factors involved as Jerusalem falls to Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 39:1–10). First, the city walls were breached so that the invading Babylonian army was able to come inside the city. The city was given over to the king of Babylon and —

When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them [the Babylonian army], they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king's garden . . . the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah . . . (Jeremiah 39:4–5).

Zedekiah came face to face with Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon just exactly as it had been predicted he would (cf. Jeremiah 32:4, 34:3, 38:18). The city was then burned with fire. Zedekiah's folly and his weaknesses surely caught up with him.

He finally had to face the futility of his life as his own children were taken captive and his sons were killed before his eyes. Zedekiah was surely taunted and mocked by women as it had been foretold (cf. Jeremiah 38:22). Even though this factor is not mentioned here in Jeremiah 39, the taunting women would have included his own wives, by whom he had the sons who were being slaughtered. Imagine having to watch your sons being slaughtered. Zedekiah knew that he had been given another option by God through Jeremiah that would have saved his family (cf. Jeremiah 38:20). At this point King Zedekiah's eyes were put out. There must have been a haunting memory of seeing Nebuchadnezzar face to face before he lost his sight. As the blinded king of Judah walked in bronze chains to Babylon he must have thought about the message he had been given that he would never see that land (cf. Ezekiel 12:12–16).

Did Zedekiah ever remember, with a sense of gratitude for God's mercy and grace, that he would die in peace and be honored in his death (cf. Jeremiah 34:4–5)? Could these verses mean that Zedekiah had finally changed his ways to become the man God wanted him to be? Did he ever do what God wanted him to do? There is no record of this except for the promise that was made in the midst of all the other depressing events related to Zedekiah's family.

The verses recorded in Jeremiah 39:11–14 are some of the richest portions of the entire Book of Jeremiah. There is a fulfillment of God's provincial care of His prophet. These verses make one want to pause to ask a number of questions:

- How did Nebuchadnezzar know Jeremiah as well as he did?
- Why did Nebuchadnezzar hold Jeremiah in such favor? Jeremiah had identified that these nations would all be sub-servient to King Nebuchadnezzar (cf. Jeremiah 25:8–11). He had pronounced over and over again to Judah

that they would go to Babylon. He had also declared that Babylon itself would ultimately become “*desolate forever . . . enslaved by many nations . . .*” (Jeremiah 25:13–14).

- Why did Nebuchadnezzar have such a strong contact with Jeremiah so that when the imposing army of Babylon came down to lay Judah desolate, at that point, he gave the following instructions concerning this one man named Jeremiah?

Nebuchadnezzar told Nebuzaradan, the captain of his military forces, concerning Jeremiah: “*Take him and look after him; don’t harm him but do for him whatever he asks*” (Jeremiah 39:12). Nebuchadnezzar gave the following orders concerning God’s prophet:

- Give him provisions: “*Take him and look after him.*”
- Give him protection: “*Don’t harm him.*”
- Give him position/prestige: “*Do for him whatever he asks.*”

Nebuzaradan was the leading military leader of a world empire, but Nebuchadnezzar told him to deal with Jeremiah by doing whatever he asked. God’s prophet was going to have the final word in his own care. God’s provisions for Jeremiah were amazing. All the background for why Jeremiah received these provisions from Nebuchadnezzar was not recorded. If a person is ever depressed and despondent, needing to know that God will forever care for His children, read Jeremiah 39:11–14 and hold those verses in your heart, soul, and spirit.

Someone might say that God’s care for Jeremiah was given because that was only the way God treated His prophets. That is definitely not so. Take note of the rest of Jeremiah 39. Jeremiah 39:15–18 contains a special message given for Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian slave. God had informed him sometime

before Jerusalem fell that He was going to take care of him. Note what God told Jeremiah to say to Ebed-Melech even while Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard:

*“ . . . ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes. But **I will rescue you on that day** . . . you will not be handed over to those you fear. I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me . . . ’ ”* (Jeremiah 39:16–18).

God told Ebed-Melech that He would deliver him *“on that day.”* God was going to deliver him from the men he feared. That means there was some concern in the heart of Ebed-Melech. God promised him that he would not *“fall by the sword.”* He was a prime prospect since he was from the country of Egypt. He was an Ethiopian eunuch, a slave, and a nobody. With mass slaughter going on in Jerusalem, why would anyone take care of a man with that much against him? For God to tell him that he would be spared from the sword must have been a precious thought. God also told him that he would have his own life, *“ . . . because you trust in me.”* These verses show God’s special interest in an insignificant slave, because he trusted in the LORD. There is a great lesson here. It does not matter how much of a nobody someone might be, if a person will trust in God, He will take care of him.

Regulations for the Remnant

After the Babylonian government was set up, Jeremiah 40:1–5 records a replay of when Jeremiah was taken captive and taken to Ramah, which is about six miles north of Jerusalem. At that place Nebuzaradan unfolded an amazing

insight into what was happening to Judah and why it was happening. He was very conscious of God's role and how Judah had not obeyed God. This commander of the imperial guard offered Jeremiah a package deal with options:

- “. . . *today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists . . .*” (Jeremiah 40:4). Most people today live and die without ever having been in chains. Jeremiah had them and it must have meant much to hear this invading foreign power to be the one who removed his chains.
- “. . . *Come with me to Babylon, if you like, and **I will look after you**; but if you do not want to, then don't come . . .*” (Jeremiah 40:4). This is the exact wording that was given from Nebuchadnezzar to Nebuzaradan for him to follow (cf. Jeremiah 39:12).
- “. . . *Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please*” (Jeremiah 40:4). Jeremiah was given the freedom and the option to go wherever he wanted.
- *However, before Jeremiah turned to go, Nebuzaradan added, “Go back to Gedaliah . . . whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the towns of Judah, and live with him among the people, or **go anywhere** else you please . . . ”* (Jeremiah 40:5). Remember Gedaliah was Jeremiah's friend (cf. Jeremiah 39:14).
- Jeremiah took this fourth option to go back with Gedaliah: *“Then the commander **gave him provisions and a present** and let him go. So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah . . . and stayed with him among the people who were left behind in the land”* (Jeremiah 40:6). This was tremendous care given to God's prophet.

Beginning in Jeremiah 40:7–12 the provincial government was set up under Gedaliah. He developed a threefold program

of operations, which basically followed the plan God had given (cf. Jeremiah 27:11–17, 29:5–7, 39:10, 40:9–10):

- “*Do not be afraid to **serve** the Babylonians*” (Jeremiah 40:9). That was exactly what Jeremiah had been telling the people to do long before the final fall to Babylon.
- “***Settle down** in the land and serve the king of Babylon . . .*” (Jeremiah 40:9). Gedaliah told them that he was going to stay in Mizpah and they were to harvest the wine, fruit, and oil which were in great abundance. There was going to be a good supply of things to meet their needs.
- **Satisfaction** was promised to the people who would serve the king of Babylon: “*. . . it will go well with you*” (Jeremiah 40:9).

Individuals, “*all the Jews*” from Moab, Ammon, Edom, and all the other countries where the people had been driven to escape the Babylonians, heard about the remnant left in Judah and they returned to Mizpah where Gedaliah was to be governor over them. Things really began to look better for this remnant who had stayed in Judah.

Beginning in Jeremiah 40:13–16 it is evident though that problems prevailed among the remnant. Men came to Gedaliah with a warning that the man Ishmael, who was connected to Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, wanted to kill Gedaliah. Gedaliah miscalculated, did not believe it, and even told Johanan that he thought he was lying. He did not investigate like he should have. He appeared to be a good man in some respects, but faltered and failed in that regard and as a result, he lost his life (cf. Jeremiah 41:1–2).

Death and Destruction Continue

Gedaliah sat down for a meal with Ishmael and ten of his men and they mixed murder with this meal. Apparently Gedaliah called for the gathering, but Ishmael had it all set up so that his men could strike down the man whom the king of Babylon had

appointed as governor over the land. Ishmael was of the royal family. Consequently when the nation failed, he may have thought he should have been the one appointed in place of Gedaliah as governor. He was the grandson of Elishama who teamed up with King Jehoiakim to burn the scroll which Jeremiah and Baruch had made (cf. Jeremiah 36:12–26). He was also one of the chief officers of King Zedekiah. He proved himself to be ruthless and selfish to the core. As the festive meal was underway, he killed Gedaliah with the sword just as Gedaliah had been warned. All the Jews who were with Gedaliah at the feast were also killed and even the Babylonian soldiers. This was just the introduction of Ishmael's ruthless actions as he continued:

The day after Gedaliah's assassination . . . eighty men . . . came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria [the Septuagint actually lists Salem, which might be more correct geographically], bringing grain offerings and incense with them to the house of the LORD (Jeremiah 41:4–5).

These men were mourners so Ishmael went out to meet them “weeping as he went.” Notice the hypocritical conduct of this conniving character. He killed seventy of the mourners and tossed them into the same cistern where he had thrown Gedaliah and all his men. Ishmael allowed ten of the mourners to live when they offered him a bribe: “Don't kill us! We have wheat and barley, oil and honey, hidden in a field” (Jeremiah 41:8). These supplies would fit into his plan to “. . . set out to cross over to the Ammonites” (Jeremiah 41:10). It is obvious that this man did not care for his own people, but instead he was catering to the Ammonites.

Ishmael's intent was to take the remaining group of the remnant and flee to Ammon. However, there were further

conflicts and the fear of captivity (cf. Jeremiah 41:11–18). At this point Johanan and his army officers went out to fight Ishmael, and the remnant left Ishmael and went over to Johanan.

Ishmael's real character can be seen at this point when he fled instead of standing up to fight Johanan. When the real test was given, his selfish treason-like nature can be seen as he slipped speedily away and headed for Ammon with eight of his men.

Once again the remnant was free, but they were not free of fear. They were now in Gibeon where Johanan and his army had caught up with Ishmael. Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Gedaliah to be the governor at Mizpah. Gedaliah, whom Nebuchadnezzar meant to be over the Jews, had been killed along with the Babylonian officials who had been with him. Ishmael, the cowardly murderer, had fled the scene leaving the small remnant at Gibeon. His flight meant the Jews could not try him as a traitor, punish him, or even prove to any of the incoming forces from Babylon that he was the traitor and murder.

Such was the sad, sickening scene in this portion of Jeremiah. Even though these chapters are divided, they all run together with the horrifying history of the downfall of the nation of Judah.

The Prophet Urged to Pray and the People Promise to Obey

Jeremiah 42 records another case where Jeremiah found within this little group that the verbal niceties were immediately connected to their rebellious naughtiness. The people begged Jeremiah to pray for them and promised to obey, but they will not do it as has been the trail they have followed. As they get smaller in number through death, it does not seem that their root core problem has changed.

In Jeremiah 42:1–6 the remnant saw they were in dire circumstances and begged Jeremiah: *“Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do”* (Jeremiah 42:3). They asked for guidance in the way they should walk and what they should do. They confessed their sin, but they did not correct their lives (cf. Jeremiah 14, 37, 38, 42).

There is only one thing that is redeeming in this portion of Scripture. Notice the excellent counseling tips Jeremiah gave: *“I have heard you . . . I will certainly pray to the LORD your God as you have requested; I will tell you everything the LORD says and will keep nothing back from you”* (Jeremiah 42:4).

- *“I have heard you . . .”* Seek information. If someone comes, keep your ears open, listen carefully both to their head and to their heart. Try to know fully the circumstances. Do not respond with only half the information available.
- *“I will certainly pray to the LORD . . . as you have requested . . .”* Make intercession before God. It is always good to go before God seeking to clear up information.
- *“I will tell you everything the LORD says . . .”* Give an exact declaration. There are many ways one can answer people even when dealing with things about the LORD. Notice the four possible responses:
 - ▶ Men can talk to others **about** what the LORD said concerning them. Talking **about** what the LORD said rather than **what** the LORD said can be dangerous.
 - ▶ Men may tell others what they **think** the LORD wants them to do. This response is even more dangerous.
 - ▶ Men can tell others part of the LORD’s message for them. That can be even more dangerous.
 - ▶ Men can give to others *“. . . **everything** the LORD says . . .”* just as Jeremiah did. This response blends

together man's needs with God's wisdom. This is the best response.

- “*I will . . . keep nothing back from you.*” Make a complete proclamation. That was exactly what Jeremiah did as he had been doing for a long time.

It is good to notice the people's response to all of this because they had assured Jeremiah they would respond according to God's message:

“May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the LORD your God sends you to tell us. Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God” (Jeremiah 42:5–6).

- The people's **perception** was that the LORD would “. . . *be a true and faithful witness against . . .*” or between them. They understood that God would be seeing everything like it was. At least that was what their mouths said.
- The people's **promise** was “*Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the LORD our God . . .*” They promised to listen to God, but that did not happen.
- The people anticipated **prosperity** from God believing “. . . *that it will go well with us, for we will obey the LORD our God.*” They truly did know how to relate to God, but sadly they would not do it.

God's message to these people was to offer peace or punishment. God made promises to the people even though there had been the critical conditions when they had killed the

governor and Ishmael had fled. Notice that in Jeremiah 42:10–18 God still promised the following things to the few who were left from the nation of Judah:

- “*If you stay in this land . . .*” The people could have been **satisfied** and **content** in that land.
- “. . . *I will **build you up** and not tear you down . . .*” God promised to be the One who would build them up. They would have been **secure**. He also promised “. . . *I will plant you and not uproot you . . .*”
- “*Do **not be afraid** of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear.*” Their fear of the king of Babylon was part of their problem. They feared Babylon more than they did God. God could have give them strength.
- “. . . *for I am with you and **will save** you . . .*” God would have gladly **saved** His people.
- “. . . *I am with you . . . to **deliver** you from his hands.*” God could have snatched them out of any danger that might come along and **sustained** them in the land.
- “*I will show you **compassion** so that he [Nebuchadnezzar] will have compassion on you and restore you to your land.*” God was going to **bless** them through the king of Babylon.

These were the great promises of what God offered to His people, but He said something else that truly shows how well God knows His children. God knew His children well enough that even though they had not said these words, He knew verbatim what they were going to say. Men really need to be careful. God knows them well enough that He knows what man is going to say before it ever comes out of his mouth. That is a very sobering thought. God said:

*“However, if you say, ‘We will not stay in this land’
and so disobey the LORD your God, and if you say,*

‘No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread,’ then hear the word of the LORD . . . ‘If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there, then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die. Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them’” (Jeremiah 42:13–17).

Punishment was also promised if God’s redeeming benefits were rejected by His people. The rejection He foresaw was threefold:

- *“We will not stay in this land.”*
- *“We will not listen to the message . . . in the name of the LORD” (cf. Jeremiah 44:16).*
- *“No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread.”*

Notice how the remnant of Judah was seeing things and how God said everything was going to be. There is a contrast in Jeremiah 42:14–16:

- The remnant said, “. . . we will not see war or hear the trumpet . . .” but God said, “. . . the sword you fear will overtake you there . . .”
- The remnant said, “. . . we will not be hungry for bread” but God said, “. . . the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt . . .”
- The remnant said, “. . . we will go and live in Egypt . . .” but God said, “. . . there you will die . . . by the sword,

famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them” in the land of Egypt.

Such are the differences between humanism and Deity. It is sobering to see these things. God further informed the remnant that when they made the wrong decisions, then they would become:

“‘. . . As my anger and wrath have been poured out on those who lived in Jerusalem, so will my wrath be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will be an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach; you will never see this place again’”
(Jeremiah 42:18).

- Detested — “. . . *an object of cursing* . . .” This term actually means to evoke or wish evil upon someone, to denounce someone violently, to anathematize one.
- Despicable — “. . . *an object of . . . horror* . . .” This would be a look that would go with a statement.
- Declared disgust — “. . . *an object of . . . condemnation*” This would be an imprecation, which means to go beyond the verbal look and blend in a cutting comment that is designed and intended to hurt someone.
- Denounced and denied — “. . . *an object of . . . reproach*” This word basically means total isolation. Anywhere they would go, no one would care for them ever again. God would no longer look out after them. This would be the closest thing to being imprisoned in solitary confinement.
- Debarred — “. . . *you will never see this place again.*” Only a devout Jew could realize the sorrow and shame related to this loss. When people were allowed to return someday and the temple would be rebuilt, none of these people would get to come home. They would be forever

removed from their land. This punishment from God could not be any harsher for these Hebrew people.

Once again God's prophet, Jeremiah, pleaded and warned his people, giving them a chance and an opportunity for prosperity:

*“O remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, ‘**Do not go to Egypt.**’ Be sure of this: I warn you today that **you made a fatal mistake** when you sent me to the LORD your God and said, ‘Pray to the LORD our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.’ I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the LORD your God in all he sent me to tell you. So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle”* (Jeremiah 42:19–22).

It must have hurt Jeremiah to have to utter these words. He knew they were only deceiving themselves. This is a sad picture of people who had begun to operate by two basic principles. They were walking by sight rather than by faith. They were blinding in their own imaginations. God's promise of His and Nebuchadnezzar's compassion upon them was not heard or believed because they stopped listening to God. They were living by the code of their own thinking and wrapping that up with the packaging of their own imaginations. How sad to see that the nation was going further and further away from God and into their own desolation.

The Remnant's Continued Disobedience

Introduction

Jeremiah 43–45

Beginning in Jeremiah 43, the remnant of the nation of Judah would take another route to their ruin. This is a sad section of the Book of Jeremiah. The thinking of these people was very mixed up. They thought they were running away from the Babylonians when instead they were actually rebelling against God. The remnant of Judah, along with Jeremiah and Baruch and the army officers were taken or led away into Egypt by Johanan. Being led by force to Egypt was not a part of the plan for Jeremiah and Baruch.

The Remnant's Continued Disobedience

- I. **Another Road to Ruin** (Jeremiah 43)
 - A. The Prophet's Plain Preaching Rejected (43:1–4)
 - B. The Persistent Plan Proceeded to Egypt (43:5–7)
 - C. The Prophetic Portrayal of Egypt's Fall to Babylon (43:8–13)
- II. **Rebellion by the Remnant in Egypt** (Jeremiah 44)
 - A. Punishment for Their Wicked Past (44:1–6)
 - B. The Price to Be Paid at the Present (44:7–14)
 - C. Persistent Rebellion Prevailed (44:15–19)

- D. Perception, a Performance, and a Promise (44:20–28)
- E. Prophetic Proof of God's Promises (44:29–30)
- III. **No Real Loss When You Are Granted Life** (Jeremiah 45)
 - A. The Message for Baruch (45:1)
 - B. The Mood of Baruch (45:2–3)
 - C. The Mirror for Baruch (45:4–5a)
 - D. The Mercy for Baruch (45:5b)

Another Road to Ruin

Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the LORD their God, but the people continued to reject everything the LORD had sent him to say. This rejection finally was the cause of the remnant going into Egypt. In this portion of Jewish history and their sordid mixed up thinking that had become so much a part of these people, it is important to occasionally see the jewels of truth within Jeremiah's plain preaching. There are homiletic nuggets in Jeremiah 43:1–4 that must not be overlooked.

Notice the how, to whom, the what, and the why in Jeremiah's preaching: "*When Jeremiah **finished** telling the people all the words of the LORD their God — everything the LORD had sent him to tell them*" (Jeremiah 43:1). Look at the King James Version of this verse:

*And it came to pass, that when Jeremiah had made an **end** of speaking unto **all the people all the words** of the LORD their God, for which the LORD their God had **sent him to them**, even all these words . . .*

The words "*made an end*" carries the idea of a "*finished*" product. Too many sermons have been half prepared and half-

heartedly presented. When Jeremiah *“finished”* his sermon, there was the picture of a *“finished”* product. Preachers need to consider how they present their lessons to the people.

Jeremiah was speaking to *“all the people.”* There is a great gem in gospel preaching if the speaker is able to address all his audience. It is important to think about the people in the audience and consider all of them: young, male, female, the elderly. Jeremiah spoke *“everything the LORD had sent him to tell them.”* He was like Paul in his address to the Ephesian elders: *“. . . For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God ”* (Acts 20:26–27).

Jeremiah spoke all the words of the LORD because that was the reason God had sent His prophet to the nation of Judah. It is not only important to cover and present God’s Word; it is also important to present the Word for the purpose God wanted His Word presented. Think about these nuggets and realize why Jeremiah preached in such a way as to offer a *“finished”* product.

Preaching with these nuggets in mind and as Jeremiah preached does not mean that all preaching will be a success. Notice that when Jeremiah had finished preaching, the response of the people was not favorable. They did not believe Jeremiah and said, *“You are lying!”* (cf. Jeremiah 43:1).

The remnant of Judah persistently proceeded where God had commanded them not to go. After approximately nine hundred years, the seed of Abraham made another journey back down into Egypt. Johanan *“took all the remnant of Judah . . . into the land of Egypt”* (Jeremiah 43:5–7). The Hebrew word for *“took”* is **laqach** which means to take away from, to deprive, to carry off as prisoners. That illustrates the fact that Jeremiah, Baruch, and all the remnant did not have a choice even though God had told them not to go. This journey was made by force.

The remnant along with Jeremiah and Baruch “. . . *entered Egypt in disobedience to the LORD and went as far as Tahpanhes*” (Jeremiah 43:7). Jeremiah resumed his prophetic life in Tahpanhes when God called upon him for a dramatic act:

“While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace in Tahpanhes. Then say to them, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here . . . He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death . . . He will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt . . . he will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt’” (Jeremiah 43:9–13).

This was a very specific prophecy of further destruction and desolation in God’s conquering of Egypt. God was going to “*take Nebuchadnezzar*” (KJV) to Egypt just as the remnant had been taken to Egypt, using the very same term of *laqach*. God was going to handle Nebuchadnezzar just as Johanan had handled the remnant. In Jeremiah 43:12 God said, “*And I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt and he [Nebuchadnezzar] shall burn them, and carry them away captives*” (KJV). This prophecy portrays Egypt’s fall to Babylon. The Egyptians were going to be punished even as God had punished Judah.

Rebellion by the Remnant in Egypt

The remnant of Judah scattered from Tahpanhes to Migdol, south and east of the Egyptian border; some to Memphis

(Noph), west of the Nile River and approximately 125 miles south of the Mediterranean Sea; and others to Pathros (“land of the South,” called upper Egypt (cf. Jeremiah 44:1). In these lands they became infested with honoring the “*Queen of Heaven*” (Jeremiah 44:17). She was actually one who was worshiped under various names by many of the oriental religions from Assyria to Egypt. She was known as the goddess of the stars, Venus, or goddess of the moon. Jeremiah 44 reveals how Judah was swallowed up by her devotion to idolatry.

There are certain key phrases and words to pick up in this chapter beginning with the references to God as “*the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel*” or “***the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel***” depending on the translation used (cf. Jeremiah 44:2, 7, 11, 25). There is an emphasis on this identification of God so that these people when they went into Egypt would know that they could not get away from God because He is “*the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.*”

There is another key word to remember in the use of the word, “***therefore/wherefore***” in Jeremiah 44:6, 7, 11, 22. Each time after one of these words was used, God extended a warning on the basis of what He had been covering. Another key word is the word “***then***” in Jeremiah 44:7, 15, 20, 24. This word was used by God, the remnant, and Jeremiah. In each case it was an expression of the reasoning of God, the remnant, or the prophet saying “*then*” for the reasons why they did what they did.

Notice that Jeremiah 44:1–6 covers the punishment of the remnant because of their polluted past. This is really yet another review by God of Judah’s stages of abomination “. . . *because of the evil they have done. They have provoked me to anger . . .*” They had chosen:

- The wrong course: “. . . *burning incense and by worshiping other gods . . .*” (Jeremiah 44:3).
- The wrong knowledge: “. . . *worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew*” (Jeremiah 44:3).
- The wrong response: God's prophets had spoken from the days of Moses to the days of Jeremiah, but the people “. . . *did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods*” (Jeremiah 44:5). God said: “*Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, ‘Do not do **this detestable thing that I hate!**’*” (Jeremiah 44:4) referring to the abomination of the worship of all these idols. And so God responded saying:

“Therefore, my fierce anger was poured out; it raged against the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem and made them the desolate ruins they are today” (Jeremiah 44:6).

Even through all of the abominations from the remnant of Judah God still tried to reason with His children by telling them the price that was going to have to be paid at this present time (cf. Jeremiah 44:7–14). He wanted them to see what had happened to them. Their evil ways were affecting many things and God questioned them: “*Why bring such great disaster on . . . Why provoke me to anger. . . ? Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and . . . ?*” Notice the disastrous affects:

- “*Why bring such great disaster on yourselves [“your **souls** (KJV)] . . . ?*” (Jeremiah 44:7). As I understand the distinction between body, soul, and spirit, the body is our acting power, the spirit is our knowing power, and the soul

is our **will power** (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). If that is right, then the remnant of the nation of Judah had surrendered their wills because of their great evil. This kind of reasoning shows up in their history all along the way.

- “. . . by cutting off from Judah the men and women, the children and infants. . . ?” Their great evil had affected their **homes** so that their families were cut off. Their homes had been torn asunder.
- “. . . so leave yourselves without a **remnant**?” Their evil ways had cut them off from the nation of Judah as a whole. Most of the nation of Judah had gone to Babylon. Now the remnant was in a strange land in the midst of pagan gods.
- “Why provoke **me** to anger. . . ?” Their evil ways had provoked **God** to anger. Their evil ways affected God.
- “You will destroy yourselves and make yourselves an object of cursing and reproach among all the nations on earth” (Jeremiah 44:8). The remnant of Judah had destroyed their own reputation.
- Jeremiah 44:9–10 is really a summary of their wickedness as they had become wicked parents, kings, queens, and wives:

“Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and queens of Judah and the wickedness committed by you and your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers.”

Notice the three negatives that define the character of the people who made up the remnant of Judah in Egypt:

- ▶ “. . . *they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence . . .*” They have shown no contrition in their hearts. They were not broken in spirit. They did not show any sense of regret or remorse. They did not have a sense of Godly sorrow that would cause them to repent (cf. 2 Corinthians 7:10).
- ▶ “. . . *neither have they feared [reverence] . . .*” (KJV). These people had no fear of God. Many times the King James Version will translate the word reverence into “*Fear God . . .*” These people did not fear or reverence God in a way that would cause them to live godly upright lives.
- ▶ “. . . *nor have they followed my law and the decrees I have set . . .*” There was no obedience among these people.

God’s conclusion, because of their corruption was, **“THEREFORE . . . I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah”** (Jeremiah 44:11). God concluded that because of their corruption His children had turned away from Him and the result was that He would turn away from them. Jeremiah 44:11–14 reveals the punishment God was going to provide.

Jeremiah 44:15–19 reveals that the persistent rebellion of the remnant of Judah prevailed. Even after Jeremiah had reasoned with them, they declared:

“We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers . . . did in the towns of Judah . . .” (Jeremiah 44:16–17).

The remnant in Egypt had become humanistic to their very core, evangelistic in that they were gloating about their idol worship, and determined not to change their ways. The faulty reasoning continued in their lives as they determined that they were better off by sacrificing to the “*Queen of Heaven*.” There were very few Jews left and they were enmeshed in their wicked, evil, idolatrous patterns.

Jeremiah continued to talk to the people, both the men and women who had been answering him. The perception of the people was all wrong. There were three stages of deteriorating conditions that existed among them (cf. Jeremiah 44:20–23). There was **no prosperity** for them because the land where they had grown up was in a state of ruin, “*an object of cursing*.” There was **no pleasure** for them because the land had become “*an object of horror*” (NAS) and “*land a desolation and an astonishment*” (KJV). There were **no people** in that land because it was in the condition of “*desolate waste without inhabitants*.” These factors identify the fact that God’s people could not even present a good résumé for success in life.

Beginning in Jeremiah 44:23 there is a review of why all of this had happened:

*“**Because** you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see.”*

- They made mistakes with **material things**. They had “*burned incense*” and made sacrifices to other gods.
- They had made mistakes with their **Maker**. They had “*sinned against the LORD*.”
- They had made mistakes with **His Message**. They had “*not obeyed him*.”

- They had made mistakes in their **march**. They had not walked according to or “. . . *followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations . . .*”

There was a twofold plan in God's promise of what He threatened to do to His children. First God said He would withdraw His name from the lips of His people (cf. Jeremiah 44:26). Various views have been given about this verse. Some have said His name would be withdrawn from their lips because their lips were going to be stilled; they were going to be dead. Some say God's name would be withdrawn from their lips because they broke His covenant and therefore they could not call upon His name. I personally think that it is more likely that they had sunk so deeply into secularism that they no longer thought about God. It is a sad, sad state when God's name will no longer be on the lips of His children.

God also said He would watch over the remnant in Egypt for evil and not for good. The Jews would perish by sword and famine. Think about this and the people who do not have a love for the truth:

The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan . . . For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness (2 Thessalonians 2:9–12).

God said He was going to give the remnant prophetic proof: “*This will be the sign to you that I will punish you in this place . . .*” (Jeremiah 44:29). They would find desolation and doom in Egypt. The threats He had made would indeed be carried out. In 582 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came back into Egypt and did much damage. He came again in 568 B.C. During this

time there was probably a definite sign then the people could see in which God proved to them He would do what He had said. Finally the people would have to face reality, but it was too late for them to change. They were on the slippery slope of Hebrews 6:4–6:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened . . . If they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

At this point in time, it was impossible to renew these people to repentance.

No Real Loss When You Are Granted Life

Jeremiah 45 is actually a transition into the prophecies in regard to the nations. James E. Smith gives one statement in regard to Jeremiah in his commentary, Jeremiah and Lamentations. It is important to know that these last chapters of Jeremiah 43–45 are the last messages delivered by Jeremiah. Other chapters later in the Book of Jeremiah were actually given years earlier. Smith wraps up Jeremiah's aged life for the Lord like this:

Stooped by age and weakened by infirmity, the old warrior can still deliver a powerful oratorical blast. In fact, one detects very little difference between this last message of Jeremiah and the first one he delivered some forty years earlier.³⁰

³⁰

Smith, James E., Jeremiah and Lamentations, College Press Publishing Company, Joplin, Missouri, 1984, p. 686.

Jeremiah was a mighty warrior for God. He worked many long years for God.

Jeremiah 45 occurs within the fourth year of Jehoiakim relating specifically to the events during Jeremiah 36 when Baruch delivered the sermon recorded on the scroll. He recorded everything Jeremiah had dictated to him and then delivered that sermon five different times by request. Baruch must have become bewildered and bothered when he had to record Jeremiah's dictation on yet another scroll because Jehoiakim had burned the first scroll. Baruch did not take this with calmness and composure. He struggled after these events. In Jeremiah 45:1–5 God seems to take the circumstances from Jeremiah 36 and Baruch's inner turmoil into account. God wanted to help mature Baruch for the harder days ahead.

Remember that Baruch went with Jeremiah down into Egypt. He would have faced harder times there and during the years after this event with Jehoiakim. Remember there were some twenty years between the events in Jeremiah 36 and the time when the nation of Judah finally fell. Baruch had thoughts and feelings that God recognized. God did exactly for Baruch what He had done for Jeremiah (cf. Jeremiah 11–20) by helping him to mature for the harder days ahead. That is the setting for Jeremiah 45: 1–5, which is a message for Baruch.

Jeremiah 45:2–3 identifies the moods of Baruch: *"This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: You said, 'Woe to me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.'"* Notice the different moods:

- *"Woe to me!"* — Baruch was **troubled** as he uttered this expression of great lamentation and cry of despair.
- *"The LORD has added sorrow to my pain . . ."* — Baruch experienced **tears** of sorrow. In other words he felt he had pain on top of pain. The LORD surely understood what he

was saying, understanding that Baruch thought the LORD had added sorrow to his pain. Baruch was doing exactly what Jeremiah had done when some things did not go as he wanted them to go. He immediately blamed God for the problems. Understanding this, God tried to help Baruch through some of his mistaken reasonings just as He had helped Jeremiah.

- “*I am worn out with groaning . . .*” — Baruch was **tired**. The King James Version says, “*I fainted in my sighing.*” The Hebrew term actually means tired or exhausted. This mood would definitely lead to the next mood.
- “*I . . . find no rest.*” — Baruch was burdened with **terrible tension**. Whether Baruch was experiencing doubt or fear, confusion or anger, exhaustion or out of control imagination, he wanted to find relief. When he tried to rest at night, he could not rest. These circumstances can be unbearable for anyone, but God does understand.

God understood the trials and circumstances Baruch was dealing with, so in Jeremiah 45:4–5 God gave Baruch a mirror telling Baruch the three things he needed to see. It is interesting that God helped Baruch to see these things just as He had worked to bring things into focus for Jeremiah. Notice what the LORD said in Jeremiah 45:4–5:

*[The LORD said,] “Say this to him: ‘This is what the LORD says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the land. **Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. For I will bring disaster on all people, declares the LORD, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.**’”*

- God was going to tear down what He had built and what He had planted He was going to uproot. God sensed the feelings of confidence and hope in the heart of Baruch for the things ahead. God knew there were going to be nearly twenty more years of deterioration for those in Judah and after that God knew there was going to be the journey in Egypt to endure. The LORD was trying to help Baruch see the times of distress that were still ahead.
- God detected a problem within Baruch that needed to be given attention. God did this very gently asking Baruch if he was seeking great things for himself. Remember in Jeremiah 36 that Baruch had written down nine months of great lessons which were received in such a way that the lessons were requested five different times. It would have been easy for Baruch to begin to think that he was the one having an influence on the people. Baruch could have easily thought he was the one doing something great. God detected the problem of Baruch seeking great things for himself and knew that he needed help.
- Baruch needed to understand that he must not seek great things for himself because God was going to “*bring disaster on all people.*” Baruch needed to realize that there were going to be heavy, hard times ahead. God was trying to tell him to be ready. Jeremiah was called by God and instructed that he could not marry and was forbidden to go to festive events (cf. Jeremiah 16). What kind of things did God call for Baruch to withhold from or take himself away from? These things are not recorded, but surely Baruch recognized there would be certain things he could not pursue under the conditions that were coming. Notice the question God asked of Baruch and break it down to apply to a Christian's life:

- ▶ “*Should you then seek. . . ?*” People need to have a goal and a purpose in life. Do you have one?
- ▶ “*Should you then seek great things. . . ?*” Some are seeking things, but there are other things that would be better for them to seek. Seek “*great things.*”
- ▶ “*Should you then seek great things for yourself?*” Are you seeking great things for yourself? This may be one of the most enticing questions of all. Are you pursuing selfish courses? It is important to do what God wants.

God saw the **moods** Baruch was facing. God gave Baruch a **mirror** to help him focus in the right direction. God also promised **mercy** for Baruch: “‘. . . *wherever you go I will let you escape with your life*’” (Jeremiah 45:5). God prepared Baruch for the harder times which would be coming. There were going to be several places involved. God not only helped prepare Baruch, but He also told him “‘. . . *I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go*’” (Jeremiah 45:5, NAS). Notice that God said “‘. . . ***in all the places*** where you may go.’”

For a number of years following this message from God, Baruch was still in the nation of Judah, but when Judah fell, the people went to Mizpah. From Mizpah, they went to Gibeon where there was more stress. Finally, they were forced down into Egypt, so Baruch actually went to several different places that are listed in the Bible. There is also tradition that says Jeremiah died in Egypt and that later Baruch was taken to Babylon, but this information is only tradition. In all of these places, God had already prepared Baruch for “*wherever you go.*”

Think about all the places God follows His children. How many other places will YOU go in your life? Each of these places is where God can also take care of His children. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28:20 to all those who

would follow after Him: “*. . . And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*”

Thus in this particular transition chapter, it is important to see God dealing with all the nations, but at the same time He is once again able to focus on one single person and help to meet his needs. God is taking care of the nations right now in this twenty-first century, but HE is also interested in every individual and their needs. Jeremiah 45 is definitely a transition chapter because it is not only moving back to the fourth year of Jehoiakim, but the following chapters deal with the messages that were delivered at that time against the nations.

Prophecies Against the Nations

Introduction

Jeremiah 46–51

Remember in Jeremiah 1:10 God said, “*See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.*” Jeremiah was certainly not the only one who prophesied about other nations. Sections of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Amos, and Jonah all speak about other nations. In fact, only the prophet Hosea fails to talk about the other nations. Consequently, these messages about the other nations were no surprise, because Jeremiah was not only following the pattern of the other prophets, he was also doing what God had appointed him to do. More information concerning the other nations is given by Jeremiah than any other Old Testament prophet. Notice that Jeremiah 46:1 says: “*This is the word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations.*”

This group of prophecies occurred during the fourth year of King Jehoiakim. It is really not a surprise that Jeremiah 46 with its group of prophetic expressions is concerning Egypt. Remember that Jehoiakim was appointed by Pharaoh Necho, the king of Egypt, and Jehoiakim’s brother, Jehoahaz, had been taken down into Egypt and died there (cf. 2 Kings 23:34; 2 Chronicles 36:2–8). This gave the remnant in Judah ties with Egypt at that present time, but past ties were also evident through the constant strife and problems between God’s people

and Egypt from the time when they had left Egyptian bondage in the days of Moses. This chapter will cover the nations of Egypt, Philistia, and Moab. God was actually discussing the other nations to encourage His scattered people. Notice the following outline for these chapters:

Prophecies Against the Nations

- I. **Declarations of Egypt's Fall** (Jeremiah 46)
 - A. Egypt's Initial Fall to Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (46:1–12)
 - B. Egypt's Ultimate Fall When Nebuchadnezzar Invaded Egypt (46:13–26)
 - C. Encouragement From God for His Scattered People (46:27–28)
- II. **Declarations of Destruction for the Philistines** (Jeremiah 47)
 - A. The Conqueror (47:2–3a)
 - B. The Conditions (47:3b–5)
 - C. The Cry of the Philistines (47:6)
 - D. The Conclusion (47:7)
- III. **Declarations of Destruction for Moab** (Jeremiah 48)
 - A. The Message of Doom Sounded Out (48:1–6)
 - B. Confused, Captured, and Cursed (48:7–10)
 - C. Cause for the Conquest (48:11–17)
 - D. The Cries of Confusion and Contempt (48:18–28)
 - E. Conquest Replaces Cockiness (48:29–30)
 - F. Cries for and of the Conquered (48:31–39)
 - G. Conquest and Calamity Are Certain (48:40–46)
 - H. Concluding Promise by the Creator (48:47)

Declarations of Egypt's Fall

Notice that the first part of this section, Jeremiah 46:1–12, regarding Egypt's fall applies to Egypt's fall at Carchemish in approximately 605 B.C. This fall is different from the fall which was recorded in Jeremiah 46:13–26. This section moves from the past into a later but more present time when God's people as a remnant had gone down into Egypt after Babylon had conquered the country of Judah. This conquest by Nebuchadnezzar probably occurred in 568 B.C.

In Jeremiah 46:3–4 notice the confident air with which Egypt went into battle. There is a good description by Jeremiah with a little bit of satire about plush and pomp and excellent weaponry and all of the readiness they felt as they prepared for battle. This excellently, equipped army was thrown into chaos and confusion which resulted in their flight away from the army of Nebuchadnezzar as the Egyptian army went down in defeat. There is almost a rerun of that arrogant attitude of assumed power on the part of Egypt in Jeremiah 46:7–9.

Jeremiah 46:10 changes the way this battle was recorded. At this point there had been a day of slaughter for the "*LORD of hosts.*" It had been "*a day of vengeance . . . on his foes.*" Consequently, this day was clearly identified, though others had been involved, as God's action against Egypt. Notice that Egypt was referred to as God's "*foe.*" They had been a constant source of irritation and conflict throughout Jewish history (cf. 2 Kings 23:29–34). God told Egypt that their remedies would be in vain: "*there is no healing for you*" (Jeremiah 46:11).

It is important to remember that after Judah fell, a remnant went down into Egypt (cf. Jeremiah 43–44). Consequently the prophecy from Jeremiah 46:13–26, in a special way, was a part of the answer God had given in Jeremiah 43–44. Even though they left Judah after God had specifically told them not to go to Egypt, they did it anyway and God told them they would not

escape from the sword. If Judah had read this prophetic statement given in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, they would have known that God had declared exactly what was going to happen when Nebuchadnezzar came with his sword into Egypt. They would have known there was going to be a final onslaught against that nation.

Egypt stumbled and fell and fled: “. . . *They cannot stand, for the LORD will push them down. They will stumble repeatedly; they will fall over each other . . .*” (Jeremiah 45:15–16). Pharaoh was described as “*only a loud noise.*” In Oklahoma, where I am from, a person would say, “Big Cloud, Loud Thunder, No Rain!” Egypt was not able to take a stand against Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon.

Remember that in Jeremiah 45:18–19, Jeremiah’s prophecy was moving into a present proclamation and earlier recorded verses were really just a review. The King who is the “*LORD of hosts*” declared that all the wealth and luxuries of Egypt were destined for destruction. It was described as “. . . *a gadfly [“horsefly”] is coming against her from the north*” (Jeremiah 46:20). That “*horsefly*” was Nebuchadnezzar coming for the final onslaught against the land. There was absolutely no defense left for Egypt: “*They are more numerous than locusts, they cannot be counted*” (Jeremiah 46:23). In the same way that locusts tend to destroy, Egypt as a nation was going to be gleaned so that all the good would be gone and every thing would be left in ruin.

Who was really doing all of this? That question is answered in Jeremiah 46:25–26 when God declared:

*“I am about to bring punishment on **Amon** god of Thebes, on Pharaoh, on Egypt and her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh. I will hand them over to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers.*

Later, however, Egypt will be inhabited as in times past . . . ”

Egypt and its people were destined to be defeated. God attacked the nation in three ways:

- Their gods — God attacked Amon, the sun god, who was their dominant god (he was parallel to the Greek god, Zeus) and all the other gods.
- Their government — God attacked Pharaoh, and the kings.
- Those who were “governed” — God attacked all those who relied on Pharaoh and trusted in him.

Jeremiah 46:27–28 contains the basic undergirding reason for this prophecy against Egypt. God wanted to encourage His children. He also wanted His scattered people to realize two lessons. Egypt was going to become desolate so they could not become a security blanket for anyone. God wanted His children to realize that He was still going to save “*Jacob my servant*” who were His people from afar. God was going to give those individuals, who had been forcefully taken into Egypt like Jeremiah and Baruch and those who were willing to obey God and do what was right, an opportunity to return. He was going to rescue those who had been scattered. There is almost a messianic twist to these verses that would parallel with Jeremiah 30:10.

As God offered encouragement to His people, He also gave them a threefold promise:

- Comfort — “*I am with you*” (Jeremiah 46:28).
- Continual assurance — “*I will not completely destroy you*” (Jeremiah 46:28).
- Correction will come — “*I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished*”

(Jeremiah 46:28). This portion of the promise would be a reality check for God's children.

God surveyed the tragedies that were coming for Egypt and offered a definite hope to His own people.

Declarations of Destruction for the Philistines

The time element for Jeremiah 47 is *"before Pharaoh attacked Gaza."* Commentaries have guessed and assumed and wondered when this might have been, but there is no real certainty to when this was. Some think that it may have been Nebuchadnezzar coming in from the north; others think it may have been one of the Egyptian kings coming through. It is not necessary to know when this happened. It is likely that the people who received this message knew. It is important to know WHO was responsible and who was going to be punished: *"This is the word of the LORD that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza: This is what the LORD says"* (Jeremiah 47:1–2). There are two good reasons given for this prophecy. First the Philistines were to be punished because of the evil spirit of revenge they had (cf. Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:17–19). The Philistines were a constant thorn in the flesh of God's people. By this action from God, *"Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I take vengeance on them"* (Ezekiel 25:17).

God described the conqueror as an overflowing torrent. More than likely this was Nebuchadnezzar: *"See how the waters are rising in the north; they will become an overflowing torrent"* (Jeremiah 47:3). Other verses describe the conditions that were going to come upon the people when the raging torrent made his attack. There were going to be grown men who would cry out and wail. These are deep expressions. Men do not usually cry too often. When they do cry and wail, it is

usually the deepest type of agony and pain and sorrow. The mourning for the dead was only a part of the picture. Some of the sorrow may have been because of the sword, some may have come from their shame, some were stressed and scared. Jeremiah 47:3–5 describes a sordid scene of sufferers.

In Jeremiah 47:6–7 there is the cry of the Philistines themselves. They identify that they also knew why all of this was happening. They were conscious of the fact that God was bringing this upon them:

“Ah, sword of the LORD, [you cry] ‘how long till you rest? Return to your scabbard; cease and be still. But how can it rest when the LORD has commanded it, when he has ordered it to attack Ashkelon and the coast?’”

They actually had a much better knowledge of God than they wanted to admit. This was a cry of surrender and a plea for a return to peace. There was no relief to come for God had commanded this attack.

There are other prophets who mention the Philistia area. Notice the ray of hope that was given to them in Zechariah 9:5–7 which speaks of that area being populated later and *“those who are left will belong to our God and become leaders in Judah.”* These verses are of a prophetic nature of the things that would come much later in history. The Philistines in this region may have indeed heard the Gospel during the first century so that some believed and obeyed (cf. Acts 8:40, 9:43).

Declarations of Destruction for Moab

Jeremiah 48 contains an extensive coverage of God’s judgment against Moab. The Moabites can be traced back to the grandson of Lot, who was the nephew of Abraham (cf.

Genesis 19:29–37). These people lived just east of the Dead Sea. Beginning in Jeremiah 48:1–6 there is the message of doom sounded out. Once again the chapter begins with the phrase, “*the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel*” or “*the LORD of hosts*.” The doom was sounded out: “*Woe to Nebo, for it will be ruined . . .*” (Jeremiah 48:1). The same doom was sounded out by the attacking army: “. . . ‘*Come, let us put an end to that nation*’” (Jeremiah 48:2). And then it seems that the nation saw the pending doom and the Moabites themselves sounded out an alarm (cf. Jeremiah 48:3–6). There is a picture of people seemingly going over the terrain and, whether they are ascending or descending, they were looking upon massive destruction.

The Moabites are an example of man’s inability to direct his own steps (cf. Jeremiah 48:7–10). Notice the course these people had taken and the price they would have to pay:

- Wrong trust — in their achievement: “*Since you trust in your deeds . . .*” (Jeremiah 48:7) all their works and their cities would be destroyed: “. . . *every town, and not a town will escape*” (Jeremiah 48:8). The Moabites were arrogant concerning the great things they had done. How many people have let their achievements become a god to them?
- Wrong remedy — in their treasures: “*Since you trust in your . . . riches*” (Jeremiah 48:7). This is like the problems seen in Ecclesiastes 10:19: “. . . *but money is the answer for everything*.” Their lands were going to be left desolate and they would retain no treasures (cf. Jeremiah 48:9).
- Wrong religion — in their god, Chemosh. Because of this god, the nation of Moab was going to be cursed through deceit (cf. Jeremiah 48:10). The King James Version says: “*Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood*.” They would have no defense. They would go into exile:

“... The people of Chemosh are destroyed; your sons are taken into exile and your daughters into captivity (Jeremiah 48:13, 46).

The confusion that came upon the Moabites was because they were trusting in their achievements and their works. They were going to be captured. No city would escape and every valley would be ruined. They were cursed because of their deceit and shunning their responsibilities. They would become a hiss and a byword unto other people.

It is important to see what really caused the conquest of Moab. They were not the only ones who went down this trail. Notice in Jeremiah 48:11–17 that cultural comforts can compromise character and lead to assumed security. Sometimes people do it because they have good health. Sometimes people feel secure because they had a certain blessing come their way. Many things can help people to be entrapped in this world. Those comforts compromise character and then people do foolish things.

Chemosh, assumed to be a mighty god, would leave the Moabites ashamed, but it was not just Chemosh. Any wrong religion leads to ruin. People need to be sure their lives, their characters, and their conduct are based upon THE BOOK.

Confidence in military might, without a right relationship with man's Maker, leads to misery. Think of this twenty-first century and how much money countries put into military purposes in order to try to keep up with or stay ahead of other countries. Countries tend to think that military power is proof of security. It never really is. Remember what has happened to countries that have fallen quickly in history without even any bloodshed. Military power is not the key. God as the Maker of man is the Key. Instead of being secure in their military might, the Moabites were slain.

Moab's fall resulted in cries of confusion and contempt (cf. Jeremiah 48:18–28). Notice Jeremiah 48:18: *“Come down from your glory and sit on parched ground . . .”* This was a humiliating journey for the Moabites. God was not doing all of this just to make the Moabites fall. He wanted His people to get their lives into focus. He wanted them to listen and learn to be able to declare and clarify to others why Moab went down.

Notice God's description of Moab in Jeremiah 48:29–30:

“We have heard of Moab's pride — her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and arrogance and the haughtiness of her heart. I know her insolence but it is futile . . . and her boasts accomplish nothing.”

Her haughtiness was replaced by the conquest which came upon her. These two verses are loaded with synonyms around the word **“pride”**: *“conceit,” “arrogance,” “haughtiness,” “insolence,” and “boasts.”* This kind of attitude led to their conquest. Albert M. Wells in his Inspiring Quotations says, “A swelled head is one disease that makes everybody sick.”³¹ He also stated, “Some people grow under responsibility, but not the proud, they swell.” Surely the Moabites, as they began to face God's judgments against them, would have agreed with Alexander Pope when he wrote:

Of all the Causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind,
What the weak Head with the strongest Byass rules
Is Pride, the never-failing Vice of Fools.³²

³¹ Wells, Albert M. Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, TN, 1988, p. 165–166.

³² Pope, Alexander (1688–1744), Poet: one of the most famous literary lights of the 18th century, excerpt from Essay on Criticism, Ln. 203.

Jeremiah 48:31–39 covers the cries for and the cries of the conquered. Notice this passage of scripture starts with *“Therefore I wail over Moab . . .”* This was a trail of tears. Look at the terms used: *“I wail,” “I cry,” “I moan,”* and *“I weep”* (Jeremiah 48:31–32). *“Although there are shouts, they are not shouts of joy,”* and *“The sound of their cry rises from . . .”* (Jeremiah 48:33–34). This cry was coming for different cities in Moab. In Jeremiah 48:35–36 God cried out: *“So my heart laments for Moab . . .”* There were mournful lamentations from the streets and the housetops: *“there is nothing but mourning, for I have broken Moab like a jar that no one wants”* (Jeremiah 48:38). That was the price Moab paid for the course they took.

Notice in Jeremiah 48:40–46 conquest and calamity were going to come quickly, like an *“. . . eagle swooping down, spreading its wings over Moab.”* There was the certainty that no matter how they tried to escape, God promised they would be caught *“. . . in a snare; for I will bring upon Moab the year of her punishment”* (Jeremiah 48:44). Those who tried to flee would fall into a pit and those who tried to escape the pit would be caught in a snare. The point was that there would be no relief. There was no hope. Jeremiah 48 ends just as it began. The same statement that was made in Jeremiah 48:1 is made in Jeremiah 48:46: *“Woe to Nebo . . . Woe to you, O Moab!”* The sad cry of woe is laced all the way through that chapter.

Jeremiah 48:47 is the concluding promise by the Creator for the Moabites. This verse highlights how good God is to mankind. What Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, could not do, Jehovah God, who is the Creator of heaven and earth, could do. He said: *“‘Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,’ declares the LORD.”*

There are several times in the prophecies against these nations that God drops a ray of hope to the people. He gave a ray of hope to the remnant and the ones who had the right

attitude down in Egypt. He gave the same ray of hope to the ones in Babylon. Notice that He also gave that ray of hope to the other nations.

I remember hearing a brother a few years ago at the York lectureships as he gave three lessons on God's evangelistic thrust to the nations in the Old Testament. I mention it because that thrust is not only seen through the comments made to these nations, but Christians today need to recognize that there never has been a time when God was not interested in all people. Even though He did have a purpose and a plan through the seed of Abraham that would become Christ (cf. Galatians 3:15–17), yet in the time that His work was going on with Israel, He was still interested in the other nations.

Notice the thought in John 7:17 when Jesus answered the Jews who were amazed at His teachings and questioned where this "*man*" got such learning. This thought should be kept in the Christian's heart wherever he goes, whatever race he contacts, whatever nation he may enter, and whatever culture he may face. Jesus said, "*If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*" If any man wills to do God's will, he shall know of the teaching (the Word of God). That is how the darkest regions of Africa or any other place can have the chance to know because God will see to it that they will get that chance. How God does it is up to Him, but that is the God Christians serve. If we want to be like our Father, then we need to also develop a growing outlook to any person we face to know that if any man wills to do His will, he will have the chance to know of the teaching. That teaching may be through YOU!

Judgment on the Nations

Introduction

Jeremiah 49–50

The caption for Jeremiah 49–50 could also be “The LORD’s Judgement on Many” because the chapter simply moves from one territory or nation to another as God’s judgment is recorded concerning many nations. The emphasis needs to be upon the fact that this is indeed the LORD’s judgment.

It is also important to notice the dominance of Deity in these chapters. There are 59 references to God in the 39 verses of Jeremiah 49. God was referred to as “*LORD*” twenty-one times. He personally used the pronoun “*I*” twenty-four times, the pronoun “*me*” four times, “*my*” three times, and “*myself*” one time. God was referred to as “*He*” four times and “*His*” two times. Because God is so dominant and also always organized, there is a pattern easily seen throughout the judgments upon the different nations noted in Jeremiah 49. The pattern is in the following format:

- God **called** on each region to consider the circumstances.
- God’s **curse** was pronounced upon the region for their wrong doing.
- The **cause** for the curse was given as God explained why He was chastening.

- A **conclusion** concerning the promised punishment was drawn and, in some cases, comfort for the future was extended (cf. Jeremiah 49:6, 39).

Judgment on the Nations

- I. **The LORD'S Judgment on Many Nations** (Jeremiah 49)
 - A. The LORD'S Judgment on Ammon (49:1–6)
 - B. The LORD'S Judgment on Edom (49:7–22)
 - C. The LORD'S Judgment on Damascus (49:23–27)
 - D. The LORD'S Judgment on Kedar and Hazor (49:28–33)
 - E. The LORD'S Judgment on Elam (49:34–39)
- II. **The LORD'S Judgment on Babylon** (Jeremiah 50)
 - A. The Prophet's Pertinacious Pronouncements
 - B. The Parallel of Punishment From Babylon and for Babylon
 - C. Babylon's Treatment of Nations and Nations Against Babylon
 - D. Why Babylon Was Prescribed This Punishment
 - E. Babylon's Fall and Favor to God's People (50:1–10)
 - F. God's Perception of Babylon and for the Penitent Remnant (50:11–20)
 - G. Details Concerning the Downfall of Babylon (50:20–32)
 - H. The Redeemer Brings Rest to the Earth and Release to His People (50:33–34)
 - I. The Sword Assures Babylon's Submission (50:35–40)
 - J. Factors Leading to Babylon's Fall (50:41–46)

The LORD'S Judgment on Many Nations

The first of the many nations mentioned in Jeremiah 49 is **Ammon**. The Ammonites were located north of Moab and east of the Jordan River. When God allocated the territories for the twelve tribes of Israel, that portion of the land was given to Gad (cf. Numbers 21:21–31, 32:1–39). For this reason it is not surprising that God opened His communication with Ammon with the following question: *“Has Israel no sons? Has she no heirs? Why then has Molech taken possession of Gad? Why do his people live in its towns?”* (Jeremiah 49:1). God was asking why Ammon had taken possession of what He had given to Gad. The fact that Molech had taken possession of Gad was sufficient reason for God to pronounce the following **curse** upon Ammon:

“But the days are coming . . . when I will sound the battle cry against Rabbah of the Ammonites; it will become a mound of ruins, and its surrounding villages will be set on fire. Then Israel will drive out those who drove her out” (Jeremiah 49:2).

The **cause** for the curse upon the Ammonites was identified under the following three basic patterns:

- Material problems — *“Why do you boast . . . of your valleys so fruitful?”* (Jeremiah 49:4).
- Money problems — *“. . . you trust in your riches . . .”* (Jeremiah 49:4).
- Moral problems — *“O unfaithful daughter . . .”* (Jeremiah 49:4). The influences that had come upon the Ammonites in the way of moral problems can be described as a backsliding daughter. When the feminine portion of a

nation begins to deteriorate morally, that nation will not be long standing.

Notice that Jeremiah 49:5 gives God's proper balanced judgment for the Ammonites' attitude. For their assumed prosperity and security, God said they would face terror and insecurity. There was one little ray of hope given: "*Yet afterward, I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites,*" declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 49:6). This comfort was offered from the Creator, the One who would restore their fortunes.

Jeremiah 49:7–22 contains the judgment on **Edom**. The Edomites were the descendants of Esau (cf. Genesis 25:30, 36:1–43). The jealousy that existed from the beginning between Esau and Jacob resulted in conflict and chaos down through the years between the Edomites and God's people. Teman, the leading city in Edom, was known as a great region of wisdom. The conditions were recorded in Jeremiah 49:7: "*Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed?*" God was declaring that Teman's counsel and wisdom had decayed. The conditions in Edom were ripe for punishment. They were going to be gleaned of all that they had. God used the figure of one gathering grapes (cf. Jeremiah 49:9). Trust in Jehovah had been a missing element in Edom and they were going to pay the price for that. The Edomites were going to "*drink*" of God's wrath:

"If those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, why should you go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, but must drink it. I swear by myself . . . that Bozrah [a city in Edom] will become a ruin and an object of horror, of reproach and of cursing; and all its towns will be in ruins forever" (Jeremiah 49:12–13).

The cause for this punishment was clearly identified:

- Edom had assumed they were a “*terror*” (Jeremiah 49:16).
- Edom’s assumption and deception led them to be arrogant which was going to leave them defenseless (cf. Jeremiah 49:16).

God clearly told Edom He was going to bring them down. He identified their defeat in a fourfold curse much like Moab’s. In Jeremiah 49:16–22 God promised they would be defeated:

- Edom would be defeated: “*I will bring you down*” (Jeremiah 49:16).
- Edom would be damaged. They were told what factors and forces would be involved in their downfall: “*Edom will become an object of horror . . . because of all its wounds/plagues*” (Jeremiah 49:17).
- Edom would be despised: “. . . *all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff*” (Jeremiah 49:17).
- Edom would be desolate: “. . . *no one will live there; no man will dwell in it*” (Jeremiah 49:18).

Perhaps in an attempt to assure these people that He would do what He had said, God asked a question: “. . . *Who is like me and who can challenge me? And what shepherd can stand against me?*” (Jeremiah 49:19). No one can stand against God. God said that even if they were able to nest as an eagle, He would invade like an eagle swooping down (cf. Jeremiah 49:22).

In Jeremiah 49:23–27 there are seven stages related to the depressing conditions, circumstances, and the punishments that were going to come upon the people of **Damascus**:

- The people were feeble. The terrifying sights they were seeing not only made them ashamed, but also unable to fight or take a stand (cf. Jeremiah 49:24).
- The people were “*fainthearted*” (KJV) and “*disheartened*” (NIV) (Jeremiah 49:23). Their fight was over. They had no energy to respond.
- The people had succumbed to fear: “. . . *troubled like the restless sea/anxiety by the sea*” (NAS) (Jeremiah 49:23). Fear is a terrible thing. Fran Tarkenton, a former NFL quarterback, is quoted by Lloyd Cory in Quotable Quotations saying: “Fear causes people to draw back from situations. It brings on mediocrity. It dulls creativity. It sets one up to be a loser in life.”³³ That was what fear had done for Damascus. Even better might be the words from Richard Halverson in Albert M. Wells book, Inspiring Quotations: “Men who fear God face life fearlessly. Men who do not fear God end up fearing everything.”³⁴ Fear was a part of the perils of Damascus.
- The people were ready to “*flee*” (Jeremiah 49:24).
- The city which had once been a place of praise, joy, and “*delight*” had been forsaken or “*abandoned*” (Jeremiah 49:25).
- The people, even the young men within Damascus, “. . . *will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day*” (Jeremiah 49:26). That was a part of their military force being defeated.
- The people would see their walls and their fortified towers devoured: “*I will set fire to the walls of Damascus; it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad*” (Jeremiah 49:27).

³³ Cory, Lloyd, Quotable Quotations, Victor Books, Wheaton, Illinois, 1994, p. 136.

³⁴ Wells, Albert M. Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1988, p. 73.

Jeremiah 49:28–33 records God’s judgment upon **Kedar and Hazor**. Kedar was a descendant of Ishmael (cf. Genesis 25:13–16). In Jeremiah 49:28 these people are described as “*the people of the East*.” The command from God and resulting conditions were given: “*Arise, and attack Kedar and destroy the people of the East . . . Men will shout to them, ‘Terror on every side’*” (Jeremiah 49:28–29). The cause for their punishment was identified as the same basic problems that had plagued all the nations during this time: “. . . *a nation at ease, which lives in confidence*” (Jeremiah 49:31). They mistakenly assumed they were secure. They were going to face terror and disaster from every side.

Jeremiah 49:34–39 covers the nation of **Elam**. Elam was related to Noah’s son, Shem (cf. Genesis 10:22, 14:1–11). The nation of Elam was so far removed from the territory of Judah that some might wonder why Jeremiah would have included Elam in this text. Jeremiah wrote about Elam because he had received his message from the LORD: “*This is what the LORD Almighty says . . .*” (Jeremiah 49:34, 38, 39). The LORD said do it and that is exactly what Jeremiah did.

The background reason for Elam to be included in these messages to the nations might be the fact that many from Judah had gone into Babylonian captivity and been scattered into various places. Historically, in the days of King Zedekiah, there was an uprising against Nebuchadnezzar by Elam. Some of God’s people in exile could have concluded they were going to gain relief through a similar kind of uprising. God wanted them to realize that the message He had given to them through Jeremiah concerning their captivity of seventy years or through three generations was not going to change (cf. Jeremiah 29:10).

God pronounced the following conditions and causes upon Elam as their punishment:

- The strength of Elam would be broken: “*See, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might*” (Jeremiah 49:35). This would be a blow to their military power.
- The scattering of the Elamites was going to be so extensive that they would end up in all the nations: “*I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam’s exiles do not go*” (Jeremiah 49:36).
- The Elamites would become scared souls whom God was going to shatter: “*I will shatter Elam before their foes, before those who seek their lives . . .*” (Jeremiah 49:37).
- The slaughter from God’s anger would add to their danger as His sword brought calamity upon the Elamites: “*I will pursue them with the sword . . .*” (Jeremiah 49:37).
- The Elamites were going to be subjected to God: “*I will set my throne in Elam and destroy her king and officials*” (Jeremiah 49:38). Commentators are not certain what this verse meant, but men like Ellicot, Adam Clarke, and Smith tie King Nebuchadnezzar’s coming or even Cyrus’ invasion later to this verse since they acted as God’s servants delivering destruction to the nation.
- God did extend a ray of hope to the Elamites: “*Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come*” (Jeremiah 49:30). That may have been carried out on the day of Pentecost when Peter preached because there were “*Elamites*” among the ones who gathered (cf. Acts 2:9).

The LORD’s Judgment on Babylon

God’s recorded judgment upon Babylon consists of 110 verses. There is a chapter division for Jeremiah 50 and 51, but there really should not be one. Notice that Jeremiah 51:59 records that this prophecy, with its judgments upon Babylon, occurred in the fourth year of King Zedekiah’s reign in Judah. Babylon was at the zenith of its power, yet at that very time the

conquered prophet boldly declared the coming conquest of the conqueror. It is also ironic because in Jeremiah 37:6–16 God’s people had accused Jeremiah of going over to the Chaldeans, but he made this bold proclamation of the downfall of Babylon. Jeremiah was not going over to Babylon and he was not going with Judah, he was listening to God from whom he received his information.

There were thirteen ways in which God was going to bring judgment upon Babylon just as Babylon had brought judgment upon these other nations. It is important to know that in this way God carried out His principle that men will reap what they sow (cf. Job 4:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6; Galatians 6:8). Consider the following judgments:

- A force “*from the north*” would conquer Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 50: 3, 9, 41–42). Remember that throughout the Book of Jeremiah Babylon has been described as the force “*from the north*” (cf. Jeremiah 1:11–16, 6:1–5, 22–24, 46:20, 24, 47:2–4).
- As Babylon “*plundered*” other nations, others would make spoil of Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 50:9–10, 21:3–5, 16:16–18, 15:1–2).
- As Babylon left others “*desolate*,” so Babylon would be left desolate (cf. Jeremiah 50:10, 13, 40, 25:12, 25:9, 11, 18, 44:12, 49:13, 17–18).
- As Babylon poured out “*the vengeance of the LORD*” on others, so Babylon would also feel His vengeance (cf. Jeremiah 50:15, 46:2, 8–12).
- As others suffered hunger in fear of Babylon’s army, so Babylon would now fear the armies to come (cf. Jeremiah 50:15, 14:17–18, 48:31–34).
- As Babylon was a snare to others, so Babylon would be taken in a snare (cf. Jeremiah 50:24, 48:42–44).

- As Babylon had drawn the bow against others, against Babylon would the bow be drawn (cf. Jeremiah 50:29, 14, 51:3, 6:23).
- As Babylon made young men fall in the streets, so Babylon's young men would fall (cf. Jeremiah 50:30, 51:3, 11:22, 18:21, 48:15, 49:26).
- Babylon had been as a kindled fire to others and so a kindled fire would rage in Babylon's cities (cf. Jeremiah 50:32, 21:13–14, 34:2, 22, 43:12–13, 48:45, 49:2, 27).
- As Babylon had made the hands of others wax feeble, so would Babylon respond (cf. Jeremiah 50:43, 6:24–25, 49:24, 4:31).
- As Babylon came as a “*lion*” from the thickets around the swelling Jordan River, so would the enemy come upon Babylon (cf. Jeremiah 50:44, 49:19, 12:5–6).
- As Babylon had given cause for others to “*wail*” (howl), so would Babylon respond (cf. Jeremiah 51:8, 4:8, 25:43, 48:20).
- A general summary of the conditions and causes can be seen in parallel between Babylon and other nations. Other parallels might be drawn concerning what God would do to Babylon. Truly He is reliable in His judgments. He is always just in what He does. It is important for men to know how fair God really is and how balanced are His decisions.

Other factors scattered within Jeremiah 50–51 were the reasons why Babylon was prescribed the punishments they received. These are the conditions and causes for Babylon's downfall:

- “. . . *for she has sinned against the LORD*” (Jeremiah 50:14).
- “. . . *you opposed the LORD*” (Jeremiah 50:24).

- “. . . *she has defied the LORD, the Holy One of Israel . . . O arrogant one . . . the arrogant one . . .*” (Jeremiah 50:29, 31–32). She defied God and became arrogant against Him.
- “*For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror*” (Jeremiah 50:38). This was one of the core causes for Babylon’s punishment.
- Babylon resisted God even tho He would have applied healing: “*We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed . . .*” (Jeremiah 51:9). God would have taken good care of Babylon if they had responded to Him. Even though they had served Him, they did not obey Him.
- Babylon had a measure of “*covetousness*” (Jeremiah 51:13, KJV).
- “*. . . I will repay Babylon . . . for all the wrong they have done in Zion*” (Jeremiah 51:24, 34–35).
- “*Babylon must fall because of Israel’s slain, just as the slain in all the earth have fallen because of Babylon*” (Jeremiah 51:49). Everything Babylon had brought upon God’s people was a reason for God’s punishment upon Babylon.

Jeremiah 50:1–10 covers Babylon’s fall and favor to God’s people. Babylon, as the one who had captured so many other nations, was now going to be captured also. Notice in Jeremiah 50:2–3: “*Babylon will be captured; Bel will be put to shame, Marduk filled with terror*’ . . . *A nation from the north will attack her [Babylon] and lay waste her land . . .*” “*Bel*” and “*Marduk*” refer to the god in Babylon. “*Bel*” was the same god known as “*Baal*” of the Sidonians. The names were different simply because Babylon was a different nation using a different language. “*Marduk*” was the name Nebuchadnezzar used in regard to “*Baal*.” This particular god was known as the god of heaven and earth. This connotation or description for

Baal/Marduk may have been the same as the one for Jehovah, but the Babylonians did not look to him in the same way the Israelites looked to the “*LORD Almighty*” because they had all kinds of paganistic twists to their worship. Such is the background for Babylon’s fall; the cause for their fall was the disease of idolatry.

The conquering force over Babylon was described as “*a nation from the north*” (Jeremiah 50:3). This nation was also described as “*an alliance of great nations from the land of the north*” in Jeremiah 50:9 and as “*foreigners*” in Jeremiah 51:2. The conquerors were identified further in Jeremiah 51:11 and 28 as the Medes, who would later become the Medo-Persian Empire. The conquest was going to be so great that “. . . *No one will live in it [Babylon]; both men and animals will flee away*” (Jeremiah 50:3).

In Jeremiah 50:4–5 God identified what His special interest was:

“In those days, at that time . . . the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the LORD their God. They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces toward it. They will come and bind themselves to the LORD in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.”

Favor was to be shown to Israel and Judah “*In those days, at that time*” for three significant reasons:

- The Person — Israel and Judah together were going to seek “*the LORD their God.*”
- The Place — Israel and Judah together were going to “*ask the way to Zion and turn their faces*” in that direction. They were finally ready to go home.

- The Precepts — The precepts were the reason Israel and Judah were ready to go home. It was more than a return to the land. They were ready to turn to the LORD and to “*an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.*”

God’s perception of Babylon and the penitent remnant can be seen in Jeremiah 50:11–20. Babylon rejoiced and was glad as they pillaged and plundered God’s people. Their gladness was to be drastically changed to shame, humiliation, and desolation. The bowman was free to attack and the warrior was given permission to shout against Babylon from every side. The vengeance seeker could openly satisfy his soul “*. . . do to her as she has done to others*” (Jeremiah 50:15). The slave, referring to God’s people who had been in slavery, was finally free to go home.

Jeremiah 50:11–18 describes the plan that God had given so He could tenderly treat His people as they returned to His pasture: “*I will bring Israel back to his own pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan; his appetite will be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead*” (Jeremiah 50:19).

Why was God going to bring His children back to the land after He had taken them away and put them into captivity to begin with? There are two reasons for God to return His people to His land:

“In those days, at that time . . . search will be made for Israel’s guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare” (Jeremiah 50:20).

Guilt and sin would not be found within God’s righteous remnant. Israel and Judah had changed and God was ready to bring them home. This was also the justification for God

placing them in captivity, specifically so that His people would change.

Notice the details concerning the downfall of Babylon as declared by God in Jeremiah 50:20–32:

- This was what God had commanded: *“Do everything I have commanded you”* (Jeremiah 50:21).
- *“I set a trap for you, O Babylon, and you were caught before you knew it”* (Jeremiah 50:24).
- *“The LORD has opened his arsenal and brought out the weapons of his wrath”* (Jeremiah 50:25).
- *“Listen . . . from Babylon declaring in Zion how the LORD our God has taken vengeance, vengeance for his temple”* (Jeremiah 50:28).
- *“See, I am against you, O arrogant one”* (Jeremiah 50:31).
- *“I will kindle a fire in her towns that will consume all who are around her”* (Jeremiah 50:32).
- Why was God acting in such a way: *“ . . . you were found and captured because you opposed the LORD”* (Jeremiah 50:24).
- *“ . . . the LORD our God has taken vengeance . . . for his temple”* (Jeremiah 50:28).
- This was God’s work: *“ . . . for the Sovereign LORD Almighty has work to do in the land of the Babylonians”* (Jeremiah 50:25). This verse is like a jewel in the midst of all these verses conveying the fact that all of this had been the work of *“the LORD God of hosts”* (KJV).

Jeremiah 50:33–34 identifies two goals God was going to carry out. The Redeemer was going to bring **rest** to the earth after all the conflict and warfare. God was going to bring them a time of peace. The most beautiful goal was that God was going to **release** His people so that they could go home.

“A sword” was going to bring Babylon down in four different ways (cf. Jeremiah 50:35–40). The *“sword”* was going to be *“against her officials and wise men”* (Jeremiah 50:35). The *“sword”* was going to be against Babylon’s mental leadership. Babylon had been the power of that era. They had been the world empire, but their leadership was going to fall.

The *“sword”* was going to come upon Babylon’s *“. . . false prophets! They will become fools . . .”* (Jeremiah 50:36). Other versions call these men *“soothsayers,” “liars,”* or *“oracle priests.”* Their mighty warriors were going to be filled with terror. Their military arsenal, *“. . . her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks . . . will become women”* (Jeremiah 50:37).

The people of Babylon had taken treasures of all kinds from the people they had conquered so their material treasures would be plundered (cf. Jeremiah 50:37b). Their madness over idols had left these people defenseless: *“For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror”* (Jeremiah 50:38).

The factors that led to Babylon’s fall were outside and inside (cf. Jeremiah 50:41–46). There were three basic factors:

- Outside invasion — The outside force was going to come in from the north: *“An army is coming from the north; a great nation and many kings are being stirred up from the ends of the earth”* (Jeremiah 50:41).
- Inside corruption — The people of Babylon had a distressed heart and limp hands. They had been in warfare too long (cf. Jeremiah 50:42–43).
- Divine judgment — The *“LORD God of hosts”* was unfolding His masterful plan:

“Therefore hear the plan of the LORD which He has planned against Babylon, and His purposes which He has purposed . . . He will make their pasture desolate

because of them . . . the earth is shaken, and an outcry is heard among the nations” (Jeremiah 50:45–46, NAS).

Babylon would be seized and at the sound of their capture, the earth would tremble. Notice God’s work among the nations in all of this. God saw the nations individually and He saw them all together.

How does God see you today?

God's Judgment

A Divine Directive

Introduction

Jeremiah 51–52

Beginning Jeremiah 51 it seems as if there is a question hanging in the air, **“Who could believe it?”** Thinking about all the fabled palaces, plush gardens, and the fabulous military might of Babylon, who would believe that all of that could fall down and disintegrate? The ones who would believe that this could happen would be the ones who would believe what God had to say about it. It did not look like there was any possibility in that fourth year of Zedekiah that the nation of Babylon with its plush power, prominence, and beauty could possibly become a desolation. As an introductory guideline for the question **“Who could believe it?”** — look at Jeremiah 51:2, 29, and 43 as these verses describe the plush gardens and the pomp and splendor. Look at Jeremiah 51:3–4, 14, 30, 53, and 56 for the description of what would happen to a disintegrating military power.

Some have emphasized that there is too much repetition in Jeremiah 50–51, but man needs to remember that God gave these passages. It is likely that there is a misunderstanding about the two chapters. Jeremiah 50 was dealing with what would happen to Babylon. Jeremiah 51 was dealing with WHO did it. In order to grasp the difference, notice again the emphasis upon God in Jeremiah 51. Jehovah was referred to as *“LORD”* twenty-three

times, "*LORD of hosts*" five times, "*God*" four times, "*King*" one time, and "*the Holy One of Israel*" one time. That is a direct reference to God thirty-four times. Adding the fifty-three pronouns referring to God ("*I*," "*Me*," "*He*," "*His*," "*My*," "*Himself*," and others), there are eighty-seven (87) references to God in sixty-four (64) verses. God truly is the One who made the unbelievable believable.

God's Judgment, A Divine Directive

- I. **Divine Judgment on Babylon** (Jeremiah 51)
 - A. What Will Happen to Babylon? (51:1–14)
 - B. Who God Is and How He Functions (51: 15–58)
 - C. God Offers a Climactic Conclusion (51:59–64)
- II. **A Review of Ruin** (Jeremiah 52)
 - A. Zedekiah and Judah Fall to Babylon (52:1–11)
 - B. Jerusalem Is Razed, Burned, and Temple Treasures Taken (52:12–23)
 - C. Prominent People Are Killed and Deportations Occur (52:24–30)
 - D. A Ray of Hope Is Left (52:31–34)
- III. **Epilogue**

Divine Judgment on Babylon

Notice that the title given for Jeremiah 51 is Divine Judgment on Babylon. Jeremiah 51:1–14 covers what was going to happen to Babylon beginning with the question of Who was doing it? Jeremiah 51:1–4 makes it very clear that God is the One who will arouse a destroyer against Babylon. Jeremiah 51:5–9 answers the questions of why and what was going to be done. God had been using Babylon without having to force them because they were of the disposition to do what God knew needed to be done to other nations. God used them because He had not forgotten Israel and Judah (cf. Jeremiah 51:5). God used Babylon

as a “*gold cup in the LORD’s hand*” (Jeremiah 51:7) pouring out His wrath upon the nations. Looking at a larger picture, God had refused Babylon: “*Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken*” (Jeremiah 51:8) because of her own arrogance and sins.

Notice the reaction of what God had in mind in the process of “the next page” of Babylon’s history. There was going to be a moment of praise and celebration from the people of Zion: “*The LORD has vindicated us; come let us tell in Zion what the LORD our God has done*” (Jeremiah 51:10).

Jeremiah 51:11 states very clearly the way in which Babylon will fall: “*The LORD has stirred up the kings of the Medes, because his purpose is to destroy Babylon. The LORD will take vengeance, vengeance for his temple.*” God’s purpose was going to be fulfilled by the Medes (cf. Jeremiah 51:11, 28).

The next section of scripture in Jeremiah 51 covers Who God is and how He functions beginning with what God had done as contrasted with what man cannot do (cf. Jeremiah 51:15–58). Jeremiah 51:15–19 could be set up in parallel columns contrasting God’s might and man’s futility. All the way through the Book of Jeremiah Judah and Israel’s core problem has been their idolatry. God’s might is given in a beautiful way in these verses:

“He made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding. When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses . . . He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including the tribe of his inheritance—the LORD Almighty is his name.”

In contrast, the verse from God in Jeremiah 51:17 accuses every man as being “*senseless and without knowledge*” or

“stupid, devoid of knowledge” (NAS). The term *“stupid”* illustrates that God develops and man deteriorates, God creates and man consumes. This refers to the stupidity of one who is unable to accomplish anything. That is man's futility. God “. . . *established the world by His wisdom . . .*” (Jeremiah 51:15, NAS). God is busy in the making business: “. . . *by His understanding He stretched out the heavens*” (Jeremiah 51:15, NAS). Man's making has brought him shame:

“. . . every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them. They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish” (Jeremiah 51:17–18).

The contrast continues showing massive energy under God's control as compared to the total futility of man who cannot control anything or generate energy without using what God has already placed upon the earth for man to use:

“When He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, And He causes the clouds to ascend from the end of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, And brings forth the wind from His storehouses” (Jeremiah 51:16, NAS).

God is the Maker of all and all idols are made! That is the contrast. The climatic thought is *“The LORD of hosts is His name!”* (Jeremiah 51:19, NAS). Idols as any kind of “lord” are simply human imaginations. The truth is given in John 15:5 when Jesus said, “. . . *apart from me you can do nothing.*” What God has done will be in contrast to Babylon, who will become undone.

Jeremiah 51:20–23 covers what God did through Babylon. The key word in these verses is *“shatter.”* The Hebrew word is **mappets**, which means to break, destroy, beat, slaughter, scatter,

including killings and captivity. God used Babylon to “*shatter*” the evil in the other nations. In contrast to the way God used Babylon, Jeremiah 51:24–26 covers what God was going to do to Babylon. It was going to be decisive and devastating. God had used Babylon to “*shatter*” other nations, but He was also going to “. . . *stretch out [His] hand against . . .*” Babylon.

How God planned to work against Babylon and who was going to be affected is given in Jeremiah 51:27–58. This is another large section of scripture that is summarized in Jeremiah 51:27–28:

“Lift up a banner in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations for battle against her; summon against her these kingdoms: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander against her; send up horses like a swarm of locusts. Prepare the nations for battle against her — the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their officials, and all the countries they rule.”

God was going to “*consecrate the nations*” against Babylon (Jeremiah 51:27, NAS). He was going to set apart the nations again to do His will upon the evil that was Babylon.

God's perception of what was going to happen is evident in Jeremiah 51:29–33. God perceived how Babylon was going to react: “*The land trembles and writhes . . . Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting . . .*” Babylon was going to surrender. God's people speak with a view of how they were going to react in Jeremiah 51:34–36. These people had been abused and misused by Babylon. They wanted Babylon to face the violence they had imposed upon them as captives. They wanted God to give them some justice. God was working upon a plan in relationship to these circumstances.

God's promise of what He was going to do to Babylon is restated in Jeremiah 51:36–44. God's plan will move to a climax when they are reveling and hot with wine and lust. God was going to call for a different kind of banquet: *"I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and goats"* (Jeremiah 51:40). A description is given in Daniel 5:13–31 when the handwriting was on the wall and Darius, the Mede, came in and the nation fell. Notice that this revelation from Daniel to *"King Belshazzar"* actually did take place at a banquet gathering (cf. Daniel 5:1).

Beginning in Jeremiah 51:45–51 Jeremiah recorded God's plea to His people to prepare and to return. God was gradually moving in the direction to fulfill His plan for His people: *"Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD"* (Jeremiah 51:45). Notice that Babylon was going to fall, but the children of God needed to be of the disposition to *"Come out of . . ."* Babylon. In order to do that, they also needed to *"Run from the fierce anger of the LORD."* The children of God needed to be penitent before God. That is part of the picture in these verses. There were four stages that could lead them to penitence:

- God was going to punish Babylon for its idolatry until they were ashamed of their idols: *" . . . I will punish the idols of Babylon; her whole land will be disgraced . . ."* (Jeremiah 51:47). It is possible to become so consumed by idols that man will become tired of them. This needed to happen to Judah and Israel.
- *"Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her," declares the LORD* (Jeremiah 51:48). There needed to be a change in the elements and in the minds of men. One factor that would bring about this joy for God's people was *" . . . because of Israel's slain"* (Jeremiah 51:49). They were

going to have relief from those who had held them in unfair circumstances in recent years.

- God's people were exhorted to remember the LORD: "*Remember the LORD in a distant land, and think on Jerusalem*" (Jeremiah 51:50). God was gradually moving, preparing His people to be able to go home.
- The disposition of God's people needed to change to prepare them for a return: "*We are disgraced . . . shame covers our faces, because foreigners have entered the holy places of the LORD's house*" (Jeremiah 51:51). The temple will be destroyed and aliens will enter the Holy Place. God's people must face up to the shame of the wrong doings that brought them into captivity. All of this will be beautifully fulfilled with the concern and characteristics that God has called for in these verses (cf. Nehemiah 1:1–2:18). In the life of Nehemiah and those traveling with him, God's plan was going to be fulfilled.

God's planned punishment for Babylon is summarized again in Jeremiah 51:52–58 with another strong thrust in regard to the punishment of their idols. Their mighty men were going to be captured, their bows were going to be broken, and they were going to "*... sleep forever and not awake, declares the King, whose name is the LORD Almighty*" (Jeremiah 51:57). The core thrust in these verses was against the idolatry (cf. Jeremiah 51:17–18, 44, 47, 51). God was identifying the core cause of why people leave Him. One way or another people get idols in their heart that lead them away from God.

In Jeremiah 51:59–64 God offered a climactic conclusion by a dramatic demonstration. This would have been quite an event at the moment when Seraiah, who was Baruch's brother, gave the speech and followed the specific instructions that

God had given. There were four stages to the instructions as Jeremiah gave the message from God to Seraiah:

- *“When you get to Babylon, see that you **read all these words aloud**”* (Jeremiah 51:61). God did not want anything left out or deleted.
- *“Then say, ‘**O LORD, you have said** you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever’”* (Jeremiah 51:62). Seraiah assured the people that God, not man, not Seraiah, and not even Jeremiah, but God was the source of this prophecy. What Seraiah was reading was out of heaven.
- *“When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and **throw it into the Euphrates**”* (Jeremiah 51:63).
- *“Then say, ‘**So will Babylon sink** to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall’”* (Jeremiah 51:64). This verse gives the reason for this demonstration in God's divine, doomed determination. Remember again, this was during the time when Babylon was the greatest power on the earth as men would measure it. This dramatic conclusion was the prophecy for Babylon's doom.

Some questions are appropriate at this point. Do God's judgments sober you? Do His judgments scare you? Could His judgments save you? Men need to work with God. Those who have lived through recent events in history in which nations have fallen need to consider the uniqueness of our times. Looking at history, isn't it obvious that God is still busy and working among the nations of this world? When He wants a nation to fall because it has gone too far, He certainly, in His own wisdom and in His own justice, can respond accordingly. This fact cries out for man individually to respect the mighty God shown in Jeremiah 51 as Babylon, the mightiest of nations, will surely surrender to the Mighty God.

A Review of Ruin

This review covers one of the areas that has been covered many times in the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 52:1–11 covers Zedekiah and Judah's fall to Babylon. These details concerning the fall of Judah have been covered numerous times in this book (cf. Jeremiah 21, 24 27–29, 32–34, 37–39). The highlights are given in Jeremiah 52:12–23. Jerusalem was razed, burned, and the temple treasures were taken. Notice how many things God's people lost when God carried out His punishment upon His people:

- Religion was gone because God's people had lost it in their hearts first, then the temple was gone, and finally the nation was gone.
- The government was gone as Nebuzaradan came to Jerusalem and set fire to the palace and all the important buildings.
- All social life was gone. There would be no merry making as the people marched to Babylon in chains.
- Security was gone because all the walls around Jerusalem had been broken down.
- The souls of the people were gone when most of Jerusalem was carried into exile.
- Significant supplies and treasures were taken to Babylon.

Jeremiah 52:24–30 lists the prominent people who were killed as Judah went into captivity. Some of the names within the list are the princes and "*Zephaniah the second priest*," but there is nothing striking in these verses. There is also the information concerning when and how many Jews were deported:

This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews; in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem; in his twenty-third year, 745 Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard. There were 4,600 people in all (Jeremiah 52:28–30).

There were also others who are not listed here in Jeremiah 52. In the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar (597 B.C.) approximately ten thousand (10,000) were taken when Coniah went into captivity. There was a previous deportation during the years of Jehoiakim in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (605–606 B.C.), but there is no number recorded of how many Jews were carried into captivity at that time. It is not important to know how many were carried into captivity, but it is important to know that God had to go this far in order to turn His people back to Him.

There is a little ray of hope given at the very end of Jeremiah 52. Notice the following brief statement:

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month. He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table. Day by day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived, till the day of his death (Jeremiah 52:31–34).

Why do you suppose the Book of Jeremiah closed in this manner? This little ray of hope surely fits the golden thread all

the way through the book. Even though there have been deterioration and shame, sadness and sorrow throughout the book, there has always been a ray of hope left by God as He promised Judah a return. God even took that hope messianically all the way to Jesus. Therefore, at the close of the Book of Jeremiah there is an optimistic gesture on the part of a foreign power toward Judah's king who had been taken into captivity. The final word in the Book of Jeremiah is a ray of hope.

Epilogue

What a Book! What a Prophet! What a God!

What a book! The following sentiments need to be in men's hearts because the Book of Jeremiah echoes a eulogy of the ungodly. It vibrates with the vanity of fallen humanity. It repetitiously reminds man that a refusal to repent invariably leads to ruin. Deception and indifference develop dangers and disaster. Watch for these things in life. Ears that will not listen, eyes that will not see, and feet that will not turn to truth will always culminate in corruption and carnality. False prophets, polluted priests, fickle leaders, and pride-filled people assure a neurotic nation. Jehovah, as a God who offers justice, can only prescribe punishment, pain, and perils, sorrow and shame for stubborn souls who are set on the sordid. These messages keep flashing in the Book of Jeremiah.

G. Campbell Morgan states in his book, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah:

Here God is ever seen keeping watch above His own purposes and ever moving toward their full and glorious realization. The New Testament is of the same nature. And in it we see the onward march of God toward the fulfillment of the purposes of His everlasting love. To walk in the light of His revelation is to find no room for despair, but to march even through tribulation and overwhelming darkness with

songs of the coming tribe forever on our lips and the light of the city of God forever shining in our eyes.³⁵

These thoughts surface enough in Jeremiah for it to be the dominating goal in the mind of Almighty God.

What a prophet! When Bill Banowsky gave a lecture on Jeremiah at the Fort Worth lectures in 1961, he made the following statement about the prophet, Jeremiah:

Michelangelo painted him as an old man bewildered and broken, sitting on the ruins of the devastated city, his noble head resting sorrowfully on his hands, bowed down so that he cannot see the miserable failure of his preaching. And yet the prophet knew that the removal of things that were shaking was so that that which cannot be shaken might be illuminated. In an age of convulsion and revolution, Jeremiah, with unhesitating faith, proclaimed the certain progress of the eternal plan of God. His immediate reward was scorn, persecution, and ingratitude, but Jeremiah will stand forever as a mighty corner stone in that foundation of the prophets upon which is reared the majestic building of the Church of God.³⁶

What a God! Once again G. Campbell Morgan has the words that you and I need to hear to describe the divine disposition of God:

We have read this prophecy very carelessly if we have simply seen in it the sorrows of a man. "*Oh, that my*

³⁵ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1969, p. 288.

³⁶ Banowsky, Bill, "Jeremiah," The Old Testament Books and Their Messages in the Christian Age, Fort Worth Christian College Lectureship, The Manney Company, Fort Worth, Texas, 1961, p. 320

head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." Can we find anything to match that? We have already done so. We have already traveled through the centuries until we have stood upon the slopes of Olivet with a man more lowly than Jeremiah and have seen Him looking at Jerusalem. We have heard Him pronounce its doom, weeping as He did so. That is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah. The interpretation of Jeremiah's suffering is to be found in the suffering of Jesus. And the interpretation of the sufferings of Jesus is found in the sufferings of God.³⁷

J. Sidlow Baxter adds the following:

Mark well then this remarkable man, Jeremiah, and as the mind lingers appraisingly upon him, let the heart's prayer be, "Teach me, O LORD, to serve as thou deservest, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labor and not to ask any reward save only of knowing that I do thy will."³⁸

I believe Jeremiah would solemnly and smilingly say that spirit and that sentiment will sustain you and assure success before the Sovereign God, the LORD Almighty. May we drink of this great divine revelation and become what God wants us ALL to be.

³⁷ Morgan, G. Campbell, Studies in the Prophecy of Jeremiah, Fleming H. Revell Company, Old Tappan, New Jersey, 1969.

³⁸ Baxter, J. Sidlow, Explore the Book (Six Volumes in One), Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Vol. III, 1974.

Dayton Keesee was an instructor in the Sunset School of Preaching (now Sunset International Bible Institute) from 1967 to 1988. Since then he has been preaching in Oklahoma. He served as a missionary to Nigeria for several years before coming to Sunset. He has also made teaching tours to India and has paid brief visits to several other countries.



Eldership workshops, teacher training courses and numerous gospel meetings have been held by Dayton in several states. He has published two books and several outlines on biblical subjects.

Dayton completed his graduate studies at Abilene Christian University (B.A.) and Butler University (M.A.). Dayton and his wife Ruth have three children.

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SUNSET
International Bible Institute
External Studies

3710 34th Street Lubbock, Texas 79410
800/687-2121 www.extensionschool.com