

PUNISHING AND RESTORING

COMMENTARY ON JEREMIAH

Paul Apple (December 2019)

For each section:

- Thesis statement ... to focus on the big idea
- Analytical outline ... to guide the understanding
- Devotional questions ... to encourage life application
- Representative quotations ... to stimulate deeper insight

Jeremiah 1:10

“See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms,

- ***To pluck up and to break down,***
- ***To destroy and to overthrow,***
- ***To build and to plant.”***

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BACKGROUND NOTES

Longman: Jeremiah did not write these words down himself. He was assisted by Baruch, son of Neriah, who functioned as his scribe. . . it is fairly obvious that the book is the result of a long and complex history of composition. Yates well summarizes the evidence when he points to the relatively confusing structure, the lack of chronological development in the book, the significant differences between the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint, different genres of literature . . . Jeremiah's prophecies are best read against the backdrop of the historical context of his life and ministry. . . **Chapter 25** plays a pivotal role in the book . . . **Jeremiah 25:1-14** summarizes the message of **chapters 2-24** and then Jer. 25:15-38 announces judgment against the nations. **Chapter 1** then is an introduction to the book with its account of the prophet's commissioning and chapter 52 an epilogue describing the fall of Jerusalem.

Baxter: It was some eighty or a hundred years after Isaiah's death that Jeremiah exercised his ministry, a ministry which continued for well over forty years, during the reigns of Judah's last five kings (i. 1-3). One has but to name these kings – Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah – to realize the darkness of those days. The late **Dr. Moorehead's** words are apt and true:

“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. . . . to see his own people, whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman, plunge over the precipice into the wide, weltering ruin.”

Jeremiah was the prophet of Judah's midnight hour. . .

His sorest inward trial was the tearing of his heart between two rival sympathies – on the one hand, a sympathy with God such as few men have entered into, and on the other hand a grieving, yearning, loving sympathy with his fellow-countrymen, which made him suffer with them. In all their afflictions he himself was afflicted. Somehow, in his relation to God, Jeremiah was a prophet, and something more; and similarly, in his ardent identification of himself with his people he was a patriot, and something more. He entered both into the life of his people and into that of Jehovah. He did not merely speak *for* God; he felt *with* Him: and he did not merely speak *to* the people; he felt *with* them. . .

The *central thought of the book* may be expressed by bringing together the two recurrent expressions, “**I will punish**” and “**I will restore.**” While there is present failure through the sin of man, there shall be final triumph through the love of God. There is *wrath to the full*, but there is *love to the end*.

MacArthur: Jeremiah carried out a ministry directed mostly to his own people in Judah, but which expanded to other nations at times. He appealed to his countrymen to repent and avoid God's judgment via an invader (**chaps. 7-26**). Once invasion was certain after Judah refused to repent, he pled with them not to resist the Babylonian conqueror in order to prevent total destruction (**chap. 27**). He also called on delegates of other nations to heed his counsel and submit to Babylon (**chap. 27**), and he predicted judgments from God on various nations (**25:12–**

38; chaps. 46-51). . .

The spiritual condition of Judah was one of flagrant idol worship (cf. **chap. 2**). King Ahaz, preceding his son Hezekiah long before Jeremiah in Isaiah's day, had set up a system of sacrificing children to the god Molech in the Valley of Hinnom (just outside Jerusalem (735-715 B.C.) Hezekiah led in reforms and clean-up (**Is. 36:7**), but his son Manasseh continued to foster child sacrifice along with gross idolatry, which continued into Jeremiah's time (**7:31; 19:5; 32:35**). Many also worshiped the "*queen of heaven*" (**7:18; 44:19**). Josiah's reforms, reaching their apex in 622 B.C., forced a repressing of the worst practices outwardly, but the deadly cancer of sin was deep and flourished quickly again after a shallow revival. Religious insincerity, dishonesty, adultery, injustice, tyranny against the helpless, and slander prevailed as the norm not the exception. . .

The main theme of Jeremiah is judgment upon Judah (**chaps. 1-29**) with restoration in the future messianic kingdom (**23:3-8; 30-33**). Whereas Isaiah devoted many chapters to a future glory for Israel (**Is. 40-66**), Jeremiah gave far less space to this subject. Since God's judgment was imminent he concentrated on current problems as he sought to turn the nation back from the point of no return.

Feinberg: Jeremiah's name, not uncommon in Israel, is of disputed meaning. It has been rendered "the Lord hurls" (cf. Exod. 15:1), "the Lord founds," "the Lord establishes," or "the Lord exalts." His name may well reflect his parents' hopes for him and the nation, in which case the last rendering would be preferable. . .

Prominent in Jeremiah's style is the note of **sorrow**. With good reason he has been called the "weeping prophet." The plight of his people never left him, and he could not respond to it dispassionately. Among his writings are some of the most tender anguish of soul. A vein of sorrow and sadness runs throughout the book. Touch the work where you will, and it will weep (cf. **9:1**).

Mackay: Jeremiah's ministry involved the proclamation of impending doom. What was to befall the people would not be a chance occurrence in the flow of human history, nor even the outworking of fundamental, underlying economic and social forces. It was an expression of the sovereign rule of the God who determines the flow of human history and whose covenant had been violated. If the people would not respond in repentance to the situation that had arisen because of their sin, then they would be swept into exile. Over the years repeated calls for repentance were spurned, and so catastrophe became increasingly inevitable for the nation. But even then there were still opportunities for individuals to escape or mitigate the impact of what was happening. What was looked for was faith – a commitment to the Lord and a personal acceptance that his purposes were determinative for life.

Ryken: Better than anyone else, Jeremiah reveals the spiritual fractures beneath the comfortable surface of daily life. This was true in the prophet's own time, as he watched his society suffer the devastating consequences of life without God. It was true in the 1960s as well, when Francis Schaeffer boldly identified Jeremiah as a prophet for post-Christian times. "Jeremiah," he wrote, "provides us with an extended study of an era like our own, where men have turned away from

God and society has become post-Christian.” It is still true today as western civilization accelerates towards the godless abyss.

Baxter’s Outline:

- (i.) INTRODUCTION – Jeremiah commissioned
- (ii.-xx.) PROPHECIES, GENERAL AND UNDATED
- (xxi-xxxix.) PROPHECIES, PARTICULAR AND DATED
- (xl-xliv.) PROPHECIES AFTER FALL OF JERUSALEM
- (xlv-li.) PROPHECIES UPON GENTILE NATIONS
- (lii.) CONCLUSION

Parunak’s Outline:

1. Biographical, 1. Jeremiah's call. 1:4-10
Lesson: God chooses, equips, and calls us to serve him.
2. Oracles, 2-25. Judgment on Judah.
Lesson: God will punish those who sin against him.
3. Biographical, 26-29. Jeremiah's relations with the Priests and Prophets. 26:1-9
Lesson: Organized religion is an enemy of God's people.
4. Oracles and Biography, 30-33. Promise of Restoration; New Covenant. 31:31-40
Lesson: God will restore Israel under a new covenant.
5. Biographical, 34-45. Jeremiah's relations with Kings. 39:15-18
Lesson: Even in judgment, God protects his remnant.
6. Oracles, 46-51. Oracles against the Nations.
Lesson: God will judge all nations, not just Israel
7. Historical Epilog: 52 = 2 Kings 24:18-25:30.
According to 51:64, this is not part of the main body of the book.

MacArthur’s Outline:

- I. Preparation of Jeremiah (1:1-19)
- II. Proclamations to Judah (2:1-45:5)
 - a. Condemnation of Judah (2:1-29:32)
 - b. Consolation to Judah – New Covenant (30:1-33:26)
 - c. Calamity on Judah (34:1-45:5)
- III. Proclamations of Judgment on the Nations (46:1-51:64)
- IV. The Fall of Jerusalem (52:1-34)
 - a. The Destruction of Jerusalem (:1-23)
 - b. The Deportation of Jews (:24-30)
 - c. The Deliverance of Jehoiachin (:31-34)

Preceptaustin.org -- Quoting **G Campbell Morgan's** "*Living Messages*" from Jeremiah: "The permanent values of this book constitute its living message. I utter that in briefest sentences. First, it teaches us that sin is its own destruction. No policy can outmaneuver God. National rebellion is national ruin. Sin carries within itself the force of its own punishment and its own retribution. Secondly, it affirms that the heart of God is wounded by sin. Judgment is His strange act. He weeps over the doom of a city. Finally it declares that the ultimate victory is with God, "He made it again." The Branch is appointed. The King-Priest has come. We are to learn that

God must punish sin, that the most awful fact of sin is that it wounds God; and finally, that if we will but have it so, if we will but turn to Him and listen to His call, He overrules by canceling, and breaking the power of sin, makes again the vessel marred in the hand of the potter." (*Living Messages of the Books of the Bible - The Message of Jeremiah*)

A CHRONOLOGY OF JEREMIAH'S 40+ YEAR MINISTRY

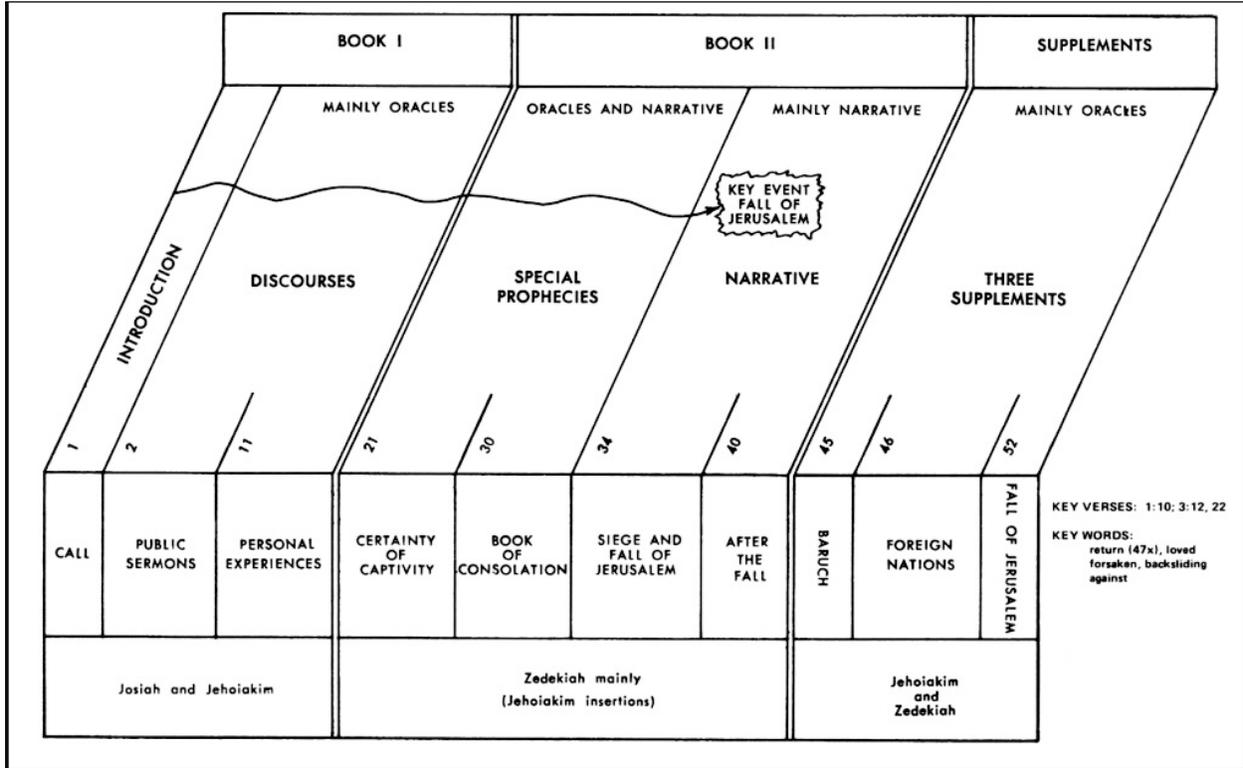
BC

- **640 Josiah** becomes king of Judah - the last godly king.
- **628** Josiah began to purge Judah in his 12th year
- **627** Lord first spoke to **Jeremiah** in 13th year of Josiah. Jeremiah 1-6 under Josiah's reign
- **622** In 18th year of Josiah Book of the Law found in House of God! (2Ki 22:8)
- **612 Nineveh** the capital of Assyria was sacked.
- **609** King Josiah killed at **Megiddo** by **Necho** of Egypt, who was fighting to bolster **Assyria** (2Ki 23:29-30).
- **609** Jehoahaz ruled Judah 3 months, deposed by Neco, taken to Egypt in chains (2Ki 23:32-33; cf Jer. 22:10).
- **609-598 Jehoiakim** reigned over Judah as an Egyptian vassal (Jer 22:13-17).
- **605 Battle of Carchemish.** **Nebuchadnezzar** defeated Egyptian forces (Jer 46:2). "Turning point in world history"
- **605** First deportation of Jews to **Babylon** - **Daniel** in this group (2Ki 24:1).
- **601 Jehoiakim** sided with **Egypt** against **Jeremiah's** warnings (Jer. 22:13-19).
- **597** 2nd Babylonian invasion takes Jerusalem, deports **Ezekiel** & 10,000; **Zedekiah** replaces **Jehoiachin** (2Ki 24:17)
- **592** Ezekiel begins his prophetic ministry (some 35 years after **Jeremiah** had begun his)
- **586** Fall of **Jerusalem** (Jer 39:1-18). Gedaliah appointed governor of Judah (2Ki 25:22-26). **Jeremiah** taken to Egypt.
- **538 Babylon** falls to the **Medes** and **Persians**

Parunak: Purposes of Book of Jeremiah:

- A. To warn of impending judgment for Judah
- B. To exhort people (and specifically Judah) to repentance and the obedience of YHWH's word
- C. To precipitate judgment by confronting Judah's response to her final warnings and pleas for repentance
- D. To predict, warn, and historically record the fall and hope of Jerusalem, as well as, its surrounding nations due to their disobedience to Yahweh's word

JENSEN'S SURVEY OF THE OT – JEREMIAH CHART



BRUCE HURT CHART – PRECEPTAUSTIN.ORG

JEREMIAH: "PROPHET TO THE NATIONS" Sin - "I Will Punish" (Jer 9:25) Hope - "I Will Restore" (Jer 30:17) Judah & Jerusalem						
Prophet Called Jer 1:1-1:19	Prophecies to Judah Jer 2:1-45:5				Prophecies to the Gentiles Jer 46:1-51:64	Prophet's Appendix Jer 52:1-52:34
Prophet's Commission Jer 1:1-19	Judah Condemned Jer 2:1-25:38	Jeremiah's Conflicts Jer 26:1-29:32	Jerusalem's Future Jer 30:1-33:26	Jerusalem's Fall Jer 34:1-45:5	Nations Condemned Jer 46:1-51:64	Historic Conclusion Jer 52:1-52:34
Before The Fall Of Jerusalem Jer 1:1-38:28				The Fall Jer 39:1-18	After The Fall	
Call	Ministry				Retrospect	
Nation of Judah					Surrounding Nations	Future of Babylon
627-582BC Ministered 40+ Years!						

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OUTLINE OF JEREMIAH

PUNISHING AND RESTORING

I. (1:1-19) INTRODUCTION

A. (:1-3) Prologue

1. (:1) Human Author
2. (:2a) Divine Origin
3. (:2b-3) Historical Timeframe and Setting

B. (:4-19) Call of Jeremiah

1. (:4-10) Commissioning of Jeremiah – Message of Judgment and Restoration
2. (:11-16) Confirmation of Jeremiah's Calling – 2 Confirming Visions
 - a. Almond Tree
 - b. Boiling Pot
3. (:17-19) Charge to Jeremiah

II. (2:1 – 25:38) PROPHECIES OF DIVINE JUDGMENT ON JUDAH AND JERUSALEM (ALTERNATING MESSAGES OF INDICTMENT AND COMING JUDGMENT)

A. (2:1 – 3:5) Message #1 – Indictment for Idolatry, Immorality and Incomprehensible Apostasy

1. (2:1-8) Contrast Between Devotion and Desertion
2. (2:9-19) Consequences of Forsaking the One True God
3. (2:20-37) Claim of Innocence Refuted by Unfaithfulness
4. (3:1-5) Complications Arising from Spiritual Harlotry

B. (3:6 – 6:30) Message #2 – Judgment is Coming and Will Yield Devastating Destruction

1. (3:6 – 4:4) Rejected Call to Repentance
 - a. (3:6-11) Indictment – Judah Even More Unfaithful and Unrepentant Than Israel
 - b. (3:12-18) Invitation – to Receive God's Grace and Forgiveness in Loving Reunion
 - c. (3:19-25) Lament – for Shameful Treachery and Perversion
 - d. (4:1-4) Plea – for Repentance and Revived Community
2. (4:5-31) Repent from Sin Before God's Judgment Devastates You
 - a. (:5-13) Look Out – 2 Declarations of Coming Judgment
 - b. (:14-18) Look Within – Your Sins Need Cleansing
 - c. (:19-26) Look Around – Images of Desolation and Dissolution Abound
 - d. (:27-31) Look Honestly – Don't Kid Yourself
3. (5:1-31) God Must Punish Those Who Forsake Him and Refuse to Repent
 - a. (:1-6) Analysis of Apostasy
 - b. (:7-13) Justification for Judgment
 - c. (:14-17) Decree of Destruction
 - d. (:18-31) Reflection on Divine Reckoning
4. (6:1-30) Stubborn Rebellion Yields Devastating Destruction
 - a. (:1-8) Divine Judgment is Coming
 - b. (:9-15) Divine Judgment is Unavoidable
 - c. (:16-21) Divine Judgment is Deserved
 - d. (:22-30) Divine Judgment is a Big Deal

C. (:7:1 – 10:25) Message #3 – Indictment for Hypocritical Worship

1. (7:1 – 8:3) Worship God Hates –
4 Forms of Improper Worship Exposed and Condemned

- (7:1-2) Prologue – Indictment Against Improper Worship
 - a. (7:3-15) Religious Formalism – Superficial Trust in Religious Places and Practices
 - b. (7:16-20) Shameful Idolatry
 - c. (7:21-28) Man-Made Worship
 - d. (7:29-34) Detestable Child Sacrifice
- (8:1-3) Epilogue – Destiny of Humiliating Death
- 2. (8:4-22) Refusal to Repent –
 - 3 Evaluations of Israel’s Refusal to Repent Despite Repeated Prophetic Warnings
 - a. (:4-7) Their Refusal to Repent was Irrational
 - b. (:8-12) Their Refusal to Repent was Ignorant and Self-Serving
 - c. (:13-17) Their Refusal to Repent was Irreversible
 - (:18-22) Epilogue: Cries of Hopeless Brokenness
- 3. (9:1-26) Indictment of False Confidence in Covenant Identity
 - a. (:1-6) Apostasy Reflected in Litany of Iniquity –
 - Culture of Iniquity Inconsistent with Covenant Identity
 - b. (:7-16) Apostasy Rewarded with Deserved Judgments –
 - Culture of Wrath Inconsistent with Covenant Identity
 - c. (:17-22) Apostasy Regretted in Funeral Dirge Mourning –
 - Culture of Death Inconsistent with Covenant Identity
 - d. (:23-26) Application: Apostasy Reversed by Boasting in the Lord
- 4. (10:1-25) True vs False Worship –
 - Reject the Futility of Pagan Idolatry by Focusing on the Power and Majesty of the Unique Living and Eternal God
 - a. (:1-5) See Idols for What They Are – Don’t Fear Them
 - b. (:6-16) See the One True God for Who He Is – Worship and Fear Him Alone
 - c. (:17-25) See Yourself as God Sees You – No Room for Hypocrisy

D. (11:1 – 12:17) Message #4 – Judgment is Coming -- but Jeremiah Must Persevere

- 1. (11:1-23) Persistent Covenant Breaking Invokes God’s Curse that Brings Inescapable Disaster
 - a. (:1-8) Stubborn Rebellion in Persistently Breaking God’s Covenant Deserves God’s Curse
 - b. (:9-14) Silent Response to Their Cries for Help Because of Their Stubborn Conspiracy
 - c. (:15-19) Scathing Rebuke for Wickedness, Idolatry and Conspiracy
 - d. (:20-23) Severe Retribution Against the Opponents of Jeremiah
- 2. (12:1-17) Divine Encouragement Pushes Ministers to Persevere in Fulfilling Their Calling
 - a. (:1-4) Need for Divine Encouragement
 - b. (:5-6) Challenge of Divine Encouragement
 - c. (:7-13) Backdrop for Divine Encouragement
 - d. (:14-17) Vision for Divine Encouragement

**E. (13:1-27) Message #5 – Indictment Against Pride –
Pride Perverts Privileged Position Into the Shame and Humiliation
of Degrading Domination**

- 1. (:1-11) Metaphor of Linen Belt – From Privilege to Putrification
- 2. (:12-14) Metaphor of Jugs of Wine – From Imbibing to Intoxification
- 3. (:15-27) Messages of Shame and Humiliation
 - a. (:15-22) Cycle 1 – Darkness, Humiliation and Domination
 - b. (:23-27) Cycle 2 – Hopelessness, Exile and Shame

**F. (14:1 – 17:27) Message #6 – Judgment is Coming --
but Jeremiah Needs Encouragement and God Will Remain Faithful to His Covenant**

- 1. (14:1-22) Reality: God is Not Going to Come to the Rescue
 - a. (:1-6) Judgment Brings Shame and Humiliation

- b. (:7-9) Jehovah God Upholds the Honor of His Name
- c. (:10-18) Judgment Will Not Be Averted
- d. (:19-22) Jehovah God Will Remember His Covenant – Not Complete Rejection
- 2. (15:1-21) Reassurance: Prophet Needs Encouragement
 - a. (:1-9) Ministry Evaluation
 - b. (:10-11) Ministry Lament
 - c. (:12-14) Ministry Ground Zero
 - d. (:15-18) Ministry Ambivalence
 - e. (:19-21) Ministry Renewal
- 3. (16:1-21) Restoration: Judgment and Restoration Magnify the Name and Power of the Lord
 - a. (:1-9) Severe Lifestyle for Severe Times – 3 Prohibitions Designed to Emphasize Coming Judgment and Magnify the Lord
 - b. (:10-13) Stubborn Lawlessness Justifies Judgment That Magnifies the Lord
 - c. (:14-21) Future Restoration and Rejection of Idolatry Magnify the Lord
- 4. (17:1-27) Reminders: 5 Key Foundational Areas
 - a. (:1-4) Sin and its Consequences
 - b. (:5-8) Faith and its Outcomes
 - c. (:9-11) Depravity and its Manifestations
 - d. (:12-18) Faithfulness as the Foundation for Worship
 - e. (:19-27) Obedience (Especially Sabbath Keeping) and its Blessings and Judgments

**G. (18:1 – 20:18) Message #7 – Indictment Against an Independent Spirit --
Sovereignty, Shock and Struggles**

- 1. (18:1-23) Sovereignty: The Sovereignty of the Potter Over the Clay
 - a. (:1-10) The Right of the Creator to Determine Destiny – Coupled with Moral Responsibility
 - b. (:11-17) The Rejection of the Plea for Reformation Brings Divine Rejection and Scattering
 - c. (:18-23) The Devious Reprisals Against Faithful Jeremiah and the Divine Retribution
- 2. (19:1 – 20:6) Shock: The Outpouring of God’s Shocking Wrath Executes His Justice and Evokes Terror
 - a. (19:1-9) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath Delivers Shocking Consequences
 - b. (19:10-15) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath Brings a Final End to Stubborn Rebellion
 - c. (20:1-6) The Outpouring of God’s Wrath Should Strike Terror in the Hearts of Those Who Refuse to Repent
- 3. (20:7-18) Struggles: The Emotional Struggles of God’s Messengers
 - a. (:7-10) God’s Messengers Suffer Greatly for Their Faithfulness to God’s Word
 - b. (:11-13) God’s Messengers Can Count on Ultimate Deliverance and Vindication
 - c. (:14-18) God’s Messengers Struggle Emotionally with the Burden of Their Calling

**H. (21:1-14) Message #8 – Judgment is Coming –
The Connection Between Social Justice and God’s Deliverance**

- 1. (:1-2) Plea for Deliverance
- 2. (:3-10) Proclamation of Defeat and Death and Destruction
- 3. (:11-14) Principle of Accountability: Administer Social Justice or Experience God’s Punishment

I. (22:1 – 24:10) Message #9 – Indictment Against Judah’s Faithless Kings and False Prophets

- 1. (22:1-30) Indictment Against Judah’s Faithless Kings – Ruined Reigns – Idolatry and Spiritual Adultery Pervert God’s Appointed Leaders From the Mandated Path of Social Justice
 - a. (:1-5) General Prescription = Do Justice and Righteousness
 - b. (:6-9) General Prohibition = Don’t Forsake the Covenant
 - c. (:10-12) The Fate of Shallum (Jehoahaz)
 - d. (:13-19) The Fate of Jehoiakim
 - e. (:20-23) The Fate of Jerusalem

- f. (:24-30) The Fate of Coniah (Jehoiachin)
- 2. (23:1-40) Indictment Against False Prophets – Counterfeit Spiritual Shepherds Substitute Their Own Peaceful Imaginations for God’s Authentic Revelation of Judgment
 - a. (:1-2) Evil Shepherds Face Divine Accountability
 - b. (:3-8) God’s Faithful Shepherd (The Messiah) Will Ultimately Reign in Righteousness
 - c. (:9-15) Evil Shepherds Deserve God’s Condemnation
 - d. (:16-24) Following Evil Shepherds Leads Only to Futility
 - e. (:25-32) God Opposes False Prophets That Deceptively Claim Divine Revelation
 - f. (:33-40) God Will Have the Last Word
- 3. (24:1-10) The Basis for Sovereign Blessing or Cursing Cannot Be Humanly Discerned
 - a. (:1-3) The Object Lesson – 2 Baskets of Figs – Ripe and Rotten
 - b. (:4-10) The Meaning Explained

J. (25:1-38) Message #10 – Judgment is Coming –

Judgment Begins with the Household of God and Progresses Against All Nations for Their Stubborn Rebellion

- 1. (:1-7) Blame Assigned – Judah Indicted for Failure to Listen and Respond to the Warnings of the Lord
- 2. (:8-14) Boomerang Effect – Judgments of the Lord Involving Nebuchadnezzar
- 3. (:15-29) Bar Scene – Jeremiah Serving Up the Cup of God’s Wrath to the Nations
- 4. (:30-38) Blast From the Lord

III. (26:1 – 29:32) CONFRONTING FALSE PROPHETS

A. (26:1-24) The Dangers of Faithfully Proclaiming God’s Word

- 1. (:1-6) Taking a Stand and Proving Faithful
- 2. (:7-15) Taking the Heat and Offering His Defense
- 3. (:16-24) Avoiding Execution and Receiving Support

B. (27:1-22) The Yoke of Submission – Submit to God’s Authority – Even When It Is Administered In Surprising Ways

- 1. (:1-11) Deliverance Thru Submission – Object Lesson for Jeremiah of Yokes of Bondage
- 2. (:12-15) Submission = The Will of God – Command to Zedekiah to Submit to Babylon
- 3. (:16-22) Deliverance Tied to Discernment – Warning to the Priests and People to Reject the Message of the False Prophets

C. (28:1-17) Dueling Prophets – God’s Sovereign Plan Will Prevail When False Prophets Oppose True Prophets

- 1. (:1-6) False Promise Announced – Breaking the Yoke of Babylon Domination
- 2. (:7-9) Litmus Test – Distinguishing the True Prophet From the False Prophet
- 3. (:10-11) False Promise Acted Out – Breaking the Yoke of Babylon Domination
- 4. (:12-17) False Prophet Denounced – Reality of Babylon Domination

D. (29:1-32) Oppressed Believers Must Reject False Promises and Pursue God’s Will While Clinging to Future Hope

- 1. (:1-14) The Game Plan for Successful Living in Oppressive Circumstances
- 2. (:15-20) The Grim Destiny of Those Remaining in the Land of Judah Should Get the Attention of the Exiles
- 3. (:21-32) The Gullibility in Embracing Deception Necessitates the Destruction of the False Prophet

IV. (30:1 – 33:26) BOOK OF CONSOLATION – PROMISE OF RESTORATION / NEW COVENANT

A. (30:1 – 31:1) Promise of Restoration For Israel and Judah

1. (:1-3) Promise of Future Restoration in the Promised Land = Theme
2. (:4-9) Promise of Deliverance From Yoke of Bondage
3. (:10-11) Promise of Security and Salvation
4. (:12-17) Promise of Restoration to Full Health and Punishment of Israel's Enemies
5. (:18-22) Promise of Restored Identity as the Blessed People of God
6. (:23-24) Promise of the Outpouring of Divine Wrath
- (31:1) Transition – Identity Statement Repeated

B. (31:2-40) Restoration Blessings and Promises – New Covenant Focus

1. (:2-14) Restoration Blessings
2. (:15-26) Restoration Promises
3. (:27-40) Restoration Focus

C. (32:1-44) Bank on the Future of God's Redemptive Agenda – Buy the Land and Bury the Deed

1. (:1-25) Current Crisis Cannot Cancel God's Redemptive Agenda
2. (:26-35) Certain Calamity Due to Persistent Provocation
3. (:36-44) Covenantal Care Demonstrated in Future Restoration – 6 Ways:
 - a. (:37) Regathering to the Promised Land for Safety and Prosperity
 - b. (:38) Reunion for Personal Intimacy and Security
 - c. (:39) Regeneration to Foster Heart-based Relationship and Righteousness
 - d. (:40) Renewal of Lasting Covenant Bond
 - e. (:41) Rejoicing in Establishing and Prospering His People
 - f. (:42-44) Resolve to Accomplish Redemptive Agenda

D. (33:1-26) Restoration Guarantee

1. (:1-13) The Restoration of National Israel Guaranteed
2. (:14-26) The Restoration of the Leadership Guaranteed – Covenantal Lines
 - a. (:14-18) Ultimate Fulfillment of the Promises Regarding Leadership
 - b. (:19-22) Reliability and Magnitude of the Promises Regarding Leadership
 - c. (:23-26) Certainty of Fulfillment of the Promises Regarding Leadership

V. (34:1 – 45:5) HISTORICAL LESSONS REGARDING OBEDIENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

A. (34:1 – 35:19) Priority of Obedience to God

1. (34:1-22) Obedience Must Be Sustained
 - a. (34:1-7) Fate of King Zedekiah Spelled Out
 - b. (34:8-16) Freedom for Jewish Slaves – Commanded but Only Temporarily Obeyed
 - c. (34:17-22) Fate of Covenant Breakers Spelled Out
2. (35:1-19) Two Contrasting Case Studies
 - a. (35:1-11) Case Study of the Faithfulness of the Rechabites
 - b. (35:12-19) Contrasting Case Study of the Unfaithfulness of Jerusalem and Judah

B. (36:1-32) Futility of Resisting Divine Accountability – Scroll of Calamity – God's Message of Judgment Cannot be Erased or Denied

1. (36:1-19) Scroll of Calamity Written, Read and Reported – Apart From Repentance, Calamity is Coming
2. (36:20-26) Scroll of Calamity Burned – Accountability Can Stir Reactions of Denial and Opposition
3. (36:27-32) Scroll of Calamity Rewritten – Attempts at Resisting Accountability are Futile

C. (37:1 – 39:18) Protection of God’s Faithful Prophet

1. (37:1-21) Confrontation Between Faithful Prophet and Puppet King
 - a. (37:1-10) The Condemned Seek to Manipulate God’s Favor
 - b. (37:11-16) The Captured Prophet of God Accused of Treason
 - c. (37:17-21) The Counsel of Jeremiah to King Zedekiah
2. (38:1-28) Confinement in the Pit – Faithful Testimony Doesn’t Deviate in the Face of Powerful Pressure
 - a. (38:1-13) Jeremiah’s Offense, Imprisonment and Rescue
 - b. (38:14-28) Jeremiah’s Interaction with King Zedekiah
3. (39:1-18) Conquest of Faith – Devastation vs. Deliverance
 - a. (39:1-10) Devastation
 - b. (39:11-18) Deliverance

D. (40:1 – 41:18) Preserved and Protected Remnant in the Midst of Chaos of Ignoring God’s Counsel

1. (40:1-16) Remnant Theology – God Preserves, Protects and Provides for His People
 - a. (40:1-6) God Preserves, Protects and Provides for Jeremiah
 - b. (40:7-12) God Preserves, Protects and Provides for a Remnant in the Land
 - c. (40:13-16) Preservation and Protection Can be Rejected
2. (41:1-18) Chaos Results From Ignoring God’s Counsel
 - a. (41:1-10) Initial Chaos Resulting From Ignoring God’s Counsel – Slaughter at Mizpah by Ishmael
 - b. (41:11-15) Temporary Deliverance – Salvation of the Remnant by Johanan at Gibeon
 - c. (41:16-18) Transition: Future Chaos Resulting From Ignoring God’s Counsel -- Safety Sought in Egypt

E. (42:1 – 44:30) Foolish Choice of Refuge in Egypt

1. (42:1-22) Egypt Chosen – Preference for Self Will vs. Will of God
 - a. (42:1-6) Testimony of the Remnant That They Will Accept the Will of God
 - b. (42:7-18) Two Choices
 - c. (42:19-22) Testimony of Jeremiah Regarding Their Foolish Preference for Self Will
2. (43:1-13) Exodus Reversed – Human Arrogance Must Bow Before God’s Absolute Authority
 - a. (43:1-7) Arrogance Leads to False Judgments and Foolish Life Choices
 - b. (43:8-13) Authority/Sovereignty Executed Over the Land of Egypt and Its False Idols
3. (44:1-30) Your Sins Will Find You Out
 - a. (44:1-14) Irrefutable Divine Logic Proving that Sin Leads to Judgment
 - b. (44:15-23) Irresponsible Denial of Divine Accountability
 - c. (44:24-30) Irresistible Precedence of God’s Judgment Over Your Commitment to Idolatry

(45:1-5) Aside – Caution Against Selfish Ambition in the Ministry – Oracle to Baruch

1. (45:1-3) Burned Up and Burned Out – Lament of Baruch
2. (45:4-5) Baruch Cautioned and Encouraged – Lessons From the Lord

VI. (46:1 – 51:64) JUDGMENTS ON THE NATIONS

A. (46:1-28) Egypt (restoration, :26b)

B. (47:1-7) Philistines

C. (48:1-47) Moab (restoration, :47)

D. (49:1-39) Many Nations

1. (49:1-6) Sons of Ammon (restoration, :6)

2. (49:7-22) Edom
3. (49:23-27) Damascus
4. (49:28-33) Qedar and Hazor
5. (49:34-39) Elam (restoration, :39)

E. (50:1 – 51:64) Babylon

(52:1-34) – EPILOGUE – FALL OF JERUSALEM

A. (52:1-11) Jerusalem's Fall and Zedekiah's Blinding

B. (52:12-23) Destruction of the Temple

C. (52:24-30) Exiling of the People

D. (52:31-34) Continuation of Davidic Lineage

TEXT: Jeremiah 1:1-19

TITLE: COMMISSIONING, CONFIRMATION AND CHARGE OF JEREMIAH'S CALLING

BIG IDEA:

THE FAITHFUL PROPHET DRAWS COURAGE FROM HIS DIVINE CALLING TO COMMUNICATE ALL THAT GOD HAS REVEALED

INTRODUCTION:

This is our introduction to the “Weeping Prophet.” Jeremiah will reflect an unusual depth of emotion as he laments the sins of Judah and God’s imminent judgment. Here he receives his call to the ministry to perform the unique role that God has predetermined for him before birth. We need to make application to the unique giftedness and role that God has for us in His kingdom program. There may be reluctance and a sense of inadequacy ... but we must come to embrace that role and trust in God’s grace and sufficiency.

Mackay: Jeremiah’s prophetic mission was in the first instance to a religiously blind and decadent age, trying to arrest its decline before it became totally plunged into disaster. This is the most remarkable fact about the book: that even when God’s message had been spurned, he continued to speak; even when his people stubbornly refused to respond to his entreaties, he was still concerned for them and addressed them.

THE FAITHFUL PROPHET DRAWS COURAGE FROM HIS DIVINE CALLING TO COMMUNICATE ALL THAT GOD HAS REVEALED

(:1-3) Prologue

A. (:1) Human Author = Jeremiah the Faithful Prophet Identified

1. By Name

“The words of Jeremiah,”

Name means either “Yahweh loosens (the womb)” or “Yahweh exalts”

2. By Family

“the son of Hilkiyah,”

3. By Status

“of the priests who were in Anathoth”

Ryken: He was born in the village of Anathoth, close enough to Jerusalem to see the city walls, but at the edge of the wilderness, where the land slopes down to the Dead Sea.

4. By Location

“in the land of Benjamin”

B. (:2a) Divine Origin and Authority

“to whom the word of the LORD came”

C. (:2b-3) Historical Timeframe and Setting

1. (:2-3a) During

a. (:2) Days of Josiah

“in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.”

b. (:3a) Days of Jehoiakim

“It came also in the days of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah,”

2. (:3b) Until

a. Dated by Kingdom Ruler

“until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah,”

b. Dated by Defining Historical Event

“until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month.”

Thompson: This event was a climax to Jeremiah’s preaching and a demonstration of his authenticity as a genuine prophet of Yahweh, for in that even the basic thrust of his prophecy was fulfilled.

I. (:4-10) COMMISSIONING OF JEREMIAH’S CALLING – TWO MAJOR THEMES = MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

A. (:4-5) Role Predetermined – Sense of Mission

“Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.’”

Thompson: If ever Jeremiah in later days was overtaken by despair he could know that the divine purpose for him reached back before his birth.

1. Intimate Personal Connection -- "*I knew you*"

Amos 3:2

Involves more than just factual information ... but approval, choice and personal commitment

2. Set Apart for Divine Purposes -- "*I consecrated you*"

Jeremiah was called to perform a specific task

Mackay: emphasis not on personal holiness as such, but on being designated to perform a specific function in divine service

3. Invested with Divine Authority -- "*I appointed you*"

B. (:6-8) Reluctance Refuted – Dealing with Inadequacy

1. (:6) Youthful Hesitancy

"Then I said, 'Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, Because I am a youth.'"

2 areas of hesitation: Inexperience and youth

2. (:7-8) Divine Direction, Enablement and Reassurance

"But the LORD said to me, 'Do not say, I am a youth, Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, And all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, For I am with you to deliver you,' declares the LORD."

Our human inadequacy is always the backdrop for God's enablement

2 Cor. 3:5

Ryken: When God gives his servants a clear calling, he does not accept any excuses. . . With God's calling comes God's gifting.

Utley: God never sends anyone out alone. His greatest provision is His personal presence (cf. **vv. 8b,19**). He goes along to help (i.e., **Matt. 28:20**) and to equip for the task assigned (i.e., **Eph. 4:12**).

Wiersbe: We call Jeremiah "*the weeping prophet*," and he was (**9:1**), but he was also a courageous man who faced many dangers and trials and remained true to the Lord. He knew that the Lord was with him.

Parunak: Two prohibitions, each with its reasons.

1. 7, Don't say, "*I am a child.*"

Reason: what JEREMIAH will do. He is not on his own initiative; should not worry about where to go, or what to do, for in both these the Lord will direct

him.

2. **8**, Don't be afraid of them.

Reason: What GOD will do. Cf. **v.17**.

a) Be with him, Cf. **Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5**.

b) Deliver him, **2 Tim. 4:17,18**, Paul's sense of the Lord's presence to deliver him.

C. (:9-10) Results Predicted – Both Destroying (Judgment) and Building (Restoration) – Balanced Message

“Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, ‘Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms, To pluck up and to break down, To destroy and to overthrow, To build and to plant.’”

Feinberg: As tangible evidence that he had empowered Jeremiah, in a spiritual experience God touched Jeremiah’s mouth. Thus he was inspired to speak God’s truth, and thus the impartation of the divine message was indicated to him. From then on Jeremiah’s words would be truly God’s, and he would actually become a mouthpiece for God (cf. Isa 6:7).

Thompson: Jeremiah would clearly have preferred not to speak about uprooting, pulling down, destroying, and demolishing the nation, and at times he clearly wished to escape that task (cf. **20:7-9**). A far more agreeable task would have been to speak of building and planting. But he did comparatively little of this constructive preaching and a great deal of the destructive kind.

Longman: The message he is commissioned to deliver is not just focused on Judah, but over nations and kingdoms. Most explicitly, we will see this in the oracles against the nations (chs. 46-51).

Utley: The first four speak of judgment, but the last two of renewal and restoration (cf. **18:7-10; 31:40**). It is interesting that Jeremiah repeats this phrasing in **31:28**, where he switches to an emphasis on restoration and deliverance. This phrase then becomes a literary marker for the two opposite prophecies Jeremiah is to speak to "*the nations*," because YHWH is the true "*King*" of all nations (cf. **I Sam. 8:4-9**).

II. (:11-16) CONFIRMATION OF JEREMIAH’S CALLING – TWO CONFIRMING VISIONS = ALMOND TREE AND BOILING POT

A. (:11-12) Vision of Rod of an Almond Tree = Certainty of Fulfillment

1. (:11) Vision

“And the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ And I said, ‘I see a rod of an almond tree.’”

The first tree to bud in spring

Thompson: Just as the early bursting into leaf and bloom of the almond tree heralded the springtime, so the spoken word pointed to its own rapid fulfillment.

Ryken: What is the sign that winter is over and spring is on the way? In the northern United States, the first harbinger of spring is the robin. In my Midwestern childhood, a better indicator of spring was the forsythia bush on the side of the house. When tiny yellow blossoms started to appear on the forsythia, spring was definitely on its way, and the urge to get out a baseball glove was irresistible. In Washington, D.C., cherry blossoms means spring. In Oxford, England, it is daffodils. . . The word for “watching” is the Hebrew *shoqed*. It sounds very much like the Hebrew for “almond”: *shaqed*. In fact, those two words – *shoqed* and *shaqed* – are different forms of the same word, the word for waking or watching. The almond tree was the waking-tree. It was the first tree to wake up after a long winter’s nap. It was also the watching-tree, the tree one watched for in the spring.

2. (:12) Significance

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.’”

B. (:13-16) Vision of Boiling Pot= Indictment of Judgment

1. (:13) Vision

“And the word of the LORD came to me a second time saying, ‘What do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.’”

Parunak: The AV has it backwards: the face (the opening) of the pot is away from, not towards, the north. A boiling pot, about to spill over and dump its contents from north to south, symbolizing the invasion of the Babylonians, following the fertile crescent, from north to south.

2. (:14-16) Significance

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Out of the north the evil will break forth on all the inhabitants of the land. For, behold, I am calling all the families of the kingdoms of the north,’ declares the LORD; ‘and they will come, and they will set each one his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls round about, and against all the cities of Judah. And I will pronounce My judgments on them concerning all their wickedness, whereby they have forsaken Me and have offered sacrifices to other gods, and worshiped the works of their own hands.’”

Mackay: This contrasts with the view that was prevalent in Jerusalem that all would be

well with Judah, and that the land was guaranteed immunity from capture – an expectation that would have been reinforced by the evident decline in Assyrian power. Jeremiah is instructed to disabuse the people of these false hopes. Prosperity from God will not come without obedience on their part as required by the covenant.

III. (:17-19) CHARGE OF JEREMIAH'S CALLING

A. (:17) Bold Proclamation – Sense of Urgency

1. (:17a) Content

“Now, gird up your loins, and arise, and speak to them all which I command you.”

Utley: "*gird up your loins*" This is a Hebrew idiom for "get ready for action" (cf. **I Kgs. 18:46; II Kgs. 4:29; 9:1; Eph. 6:14; I Pet. 1:13**), which would be similar to our "roll up your sleeves."

Girding up his loins meant to pull one's robe through the legs in front and tuck it into the sash, thereby forming tight-fitting shorts, ready for action. This is not the only preparatory action the prophet is told to do.

2. (:17b) Courage

“Do not be dismayed before them, lest I dismay you before them.”

Parunak: Second Reassurance, 17-19 Three natural parts:

- what Jeremiah is to do;
- what the Lord will do;
- and what the people will do.

1. **17**, Jeremiah's responsibility: three positive steps, and one negative.

2. **18a**, What God will do. In contrast to Jerusalem, which will fall to the enemy, God will make Jeremiah a fortified city, with iron bolt and brass walls, absolutely invincible in the coming struggle. Application: God's protection of us may consist, not in removing us from trouble, but in strengthening us to endure in trouble.

3. **18b-19a**, What the people will do.

B. (:18-19) Reassuring Promise – Dealing with Danger

1. (:18) Impenetrable – 3 Military Images of Protection

“Now behold, I have made you today as a fortified city, and as a pillar of iron and as walls of bronze against the whole land, to the kings of Judah, to its princes, to its priests and to the people of the land.”

Longman: the commission leaves no doubt. Jeremiah is about to enter a war; his

opposition will be powerful (kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land) and determined.

2. (:19) Invincible

“And they will fight against you, but they will not overcome you, for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the LORD.”

Kidner: God does not cut the knot. For Jeremiah or for us, the way in general is not to stop the fight but to stand by the fighter.

Wiersbe: Measured by human standards, his ministry was a failure, but measured by the will of God, he was a great success. It isn't easy to stand alone, to resist the crowd, and to be out of step with the philosophies and values of the times. Jeremiah, however, lived that kind of a life for over forty years.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we use this passage to demonstrate that the Scriptures consider the unborn fetus to be a person – created in the image of God and living in relationship to God?
- 2) As you study the political and religious climate of the kings during whose reigns Jeremiah ministered, what were some of the challenges the nation faced?
- 3) How do we discern God's calling for our life in terms of spiritual service?
- 4) How has God dealt with your hesitations to minister or sense of inadequacy or reluctance to step out in faith?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Jeremiah's commission from God (**ch.1**) gives him authority with both the religious (**26-29**) and the secular (**32-45**) leaders of the nation, and equips him to speak of judgment and blessing, both among God's people and among the heathen. We also have an unction from the Holy One. Are we as diligent in our ministry?

. . . for sending a servant to do a task. When God is doing the sending, there are four central parts, with others less important: **Commission, Objection, Reassurance, Sign.** Consider several examples: Moses, Gideon, Saul, Isaiah, and now Jeremiah.

Malick:

I. Prologue--Title and Call of Jeremiah: Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, is introduced as a prophet called from the womb by the Lord to prophesy the Lord's words of judgment

and restoration from the reign of Josiah until the captivity of Judah even though the people will resist him **1:1-19**

- A. Preface to the Book of Jeremiah: This book contains the words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, which were communicated by the Lord to him from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (627/6 B.C.), through the eleventh year of Zedekiah until the exile of Judah in the fifth month **1:1-3**

- B. Call and Commission of Jeremiah: Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to the nations before his birth and encouraged to speak His words of judgment and restoration even through the people will resist him **1:4-19**
 - 1. Call of Jeremiah: Jeremiah was chosen by the Lord before his birth to be a prophet of his words to the nations and is encouraged to speak his words of judgment and restoration **1:4-10**

 - 2. The Clarification of Jeremiah's Call: Through two visions Jeremiah is told of coming judgment for Judah which the people will resist, but which the Lord will bring to pass **1:11-19**
 - a. Two Visions: **1:11-16**
 - 1) The Rod of the Almond Tree--The Lord is Watching to Do His Word: **1:11-12**

 - 2) A Boiling Pot--Coming Judgment by the Nations from the North: **1:13-16**

 - b. Charge to Jeremiah: Jeremiah is urged to gird himself up and to begin prophesying with the knowledge that even though he will be resisted, God's promises will prevail **1:17-19**

Ryken quoting **Eugene Peterson** regarding God's choice of Jeremiah:

My identity does not begin when I begin to understand myself. There is something previous to what I think about myself, and it is what God thinks of me. That means that everything I think and feel is by nature a response, and the one to whom I respond is God. I never speak the first word. I never make the first move.

Jeremiah's life didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's salvation didn't start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah's truth didn't start with Jeremiah. He entered the world in which the essential parts of his existence were already ancient history. So do we.

Ryken quoting **John Calvin**:

Strength shall never be wanting to God's servants, while they derive courage from the conviction that God himself is the author of their calling . . . for God will then supply them with strength and courage invincible, so as to render them formidable to the whole world: but if they be unhinged and timid, and turn here and there, and be influenced by

the fear of men, God will render them base and contemptible, and make them to tremble at the least breath of air, and they shall be wholly broken down . . .

Wiersbe: Jeremiah preached to the nation for forty years, giving them God's promises and warnings; yet he lived to see Jerusalem and his beloved temple destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's army and his people taken captive to Babylon. Jeremiah ministered in turbulent times and yet remained faithful to the Lord. He exposed the futile foreign policy of the rulers, pleading with them to turn to the Lord with all their hearts and trust God instead of trusting their political allies. Jeremiah is one of Scripture's greatest examples of faithfulness and decisive action in the face of physical danger and national decay.

Mackay: Introductions are important because first impressions frequently linger, even when they are in fact mistaken. The Book of Jeremiah begins with what are in effect two introductions: the first (vv. 1-3) is the literary introduction to the book in the form in which we now have it; the second (vv. 4-19) is the record of the way in which Jeremiah entered on his prophetic ministry. One did not become a prophet of the Lord by family descent or by popular choice. It was the Lord alone who selected and appointed his prophetic messengers. Therefore the call by which God made known to them his purpose for their lives was the constitutive moment for their entire ministry. They could no longer live as they had previously; they had an inescapable divine directive to comply with. Moreover, the fact that a prophet had been divinely called was of vital significance to the people to whom he ministered. He was no longer a man uttering a message that reflected his own perception of their current situation, but one who came with a divinely originated message which was ignored at one's peril. In presenting the account of his call to the people, Jeremiah was accrediting himself as a spokesman of the Lord, publicly committing himself to act in accordance with that commission, and claiming the right to demand their attention to what he said to them. . .

Through forty years of frequently difficult circumstances Jeremiah had not deserted his post, but had warned Judah of the impending execution of the Lord's judgment. When this came to pass with the fall of the city, it was a devastating climax to, and vindication of, Jeremiah' ministry. The people had not accepted his warnings, and had rather given credence to those who proclaimed that somehow or other Jerusalem would escape the worst. But the people's continuing rebellion against the Lord ensured that there could be no mitigation or avoidance of the sentence against them. Their dreams of security were shattered by the fall of the city, when Jeremiah was shown to have been right after all. Subsequent generations had to accept and live with that reality. It was for them that the prophet recorded the warnings God had given over the years so that they might acknowledge that their nation had brought disaster on itself. But there was still hope, because along with the many solemn warnings there had been given indications of a new age and a new covenant (31:23-40; 33:6-26). If Jeremiah's ministry had not been able to turn Judah from its disastrous course in the years leading up to 586 BC, then it could still be blessed to those who grappled with the aftermath of their national folly.

Peter Wallace: The Word of the Lord

Introduction: “Jeremiah...to Whom the Word of the LORD Came...” (v1-3)

Verse 1 tells us that he was the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. Anathoth is only a couple of miles from Jerusalem. It was the city of David’s high priest Abiathar. But Abiathar was of the line of Eli – and after the days of David, the house of Eli was replaced with Zadok. So Jeremiah would have been quite familiar with the inner workings of the temple, but Jeremiah was not in the inner circle.

And verses 2-3 tell us when the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: Josiah began to rule in 640 BC, which means that the 13th year was 627 BC. The captivity happened in 587 BC – so the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah for 40 years – from 627 to 587 BC.

This morning we reflected on Isaiah 7 – when Ahaz, 100 years before, was contemplating what to do in the face of a local threat from Samaria and Damascus – the Israelites and the Syrians. Ahaz rejected the counsel of Isaiah and turned for help to the Assyrians. The Assyrians and the Babylonians were the two main powers of the Ancient Near East.

The Assyrian empire was centered at Nineveh (across the river from the modern city of Mosul – in northern Iraq). The Babylonian empire was centered at Babylon (near modern Baghdad – in southern Iraq). In Isaiah’s day (100 years before Jeremiah) the Assyrians were the dominant power – but the Babylonians were stirring again.

Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, believed the LORD’s promises and he renounced the treaty with Assyria – and worshiped the LORD only. He and the people of Judah paid a terrible price! Yes, it’s true that Jerusalem survived the siege of Sennacherib, but at what cost? “Your country lies desolate, your cities are burned with fire... And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard.” (Isaiah 1:7, 8) Sennacherib boasted that he destroyed 46 walled cities in Judah. Jerusalem alone survived. Is it any wonder that Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, turned away from his father’s faith?

Faith in Yahweh and his prophets can get you killed – and your people destroyed. If I am going to be a faithful king to those under my charge, then I must protect them. And so Manasseh’s name is found on a treaty tablet in Assyria from 672 BC, stating that he will worship the Assyrian god Asshur as his own god. The whole of Judah’s history can be seen in the light of the practical politics of the day. If Jerusalem is going to remain an independent city, then the son of David will need the patronage of one of the great powers. The experience of Samaria and Damascus in the 8th century made it clear: “Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated.” The tiny kingdoms of Palestine could not possibly resist the empires of Assyria or Babylon. And so, when you look at the books of the kings and the prophets you can easily see how party politics in Jerusalem was the order of the day. There was the pro-Babylonian party – and the pro-Assyrian party. Once the Assyrians are squashed, the pro-Assyrian party tends to align with Egypt against Babylon. I’m sure that both sides (for the most part) still believed in Yahweh. But they were political realists. In their view, it’s just not realistic to expect

that Yahweh will protect us. And, quite frankly, if maintaining and expanding Jerusalem's political influence is your standard for success, then there is reason to doubt that Yahweh will succeed against the Babylonians.

Remember Hezekiah? Manasseh's supporters would have told the story of Hezekiah over and over again! When you trust in Yahweh to save you from the empires of this age – first, you get squashed, dozens of cities get destroyed, thousands of people are killed, and many thousands more are deported. Sure, maybe Yahweh shows up at the end to 'save the day,' but if your idea of "salvation" is that you first have to be beaten up and brought to the very brink of death and destruction – that's not a very appealing view of salvation!!

When Jesus said "if any man would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," he was just saying what Isaiah and Jeremiah had said before him. The cross does not follow the standards of realpolitik – and the outward glory of the nations is not the way of the kingdom of God! Jeremiah will show us that the cross was always God's standard. It's not that Israel failed to be a glorious kingdom, so God chose the cross as a second option! Rather, Israel failed to bear the cross. Isaiah had said that Israel was called to be the suffering servant. There is no way to glory that does not first lead through suffering and death.

So the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the thirteenth year of Josiah until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah – until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month. And as we go through the book of Jeremiah, it will become clear that the word of the LORD is relentlessly driving us to the exile. It will take us 52 chapters to get to the exile – but if you think that it will be a long journey for you, just imagine what it was like for Jeremiah! He knew for 40 years that the end was coming. He knew for 40 years that there was no escape. You will only have to endure 40 sermons – 40 weeks in which we will see how Jeremiah's words reflect both judgment and hope. Because even though Jeremiah never offers hope that the exile can be avoided, he does offer hope! You may have a future! But only if you renounce the future that you wanted and expected. Jeremiah 29:11 – "I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future." Are you willing to surrender the future that you wanted and expected? Are you willing to deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus?

1. The Word of the LORD Came to Me (v4-10)

a. "Before I Formed You in the Womb I Knew You" – The Consecration of the Prophet (v4-5 "Appointed" is a very good translation. But the verb is the verb "to give.")

It's the same verb used to refer to the appointment of the Levites in Numbers 8. "They are appointed (or given)" to the LORD for service in the sanctuary. Likewise, Jeremiah is appointed (or given) to the nations as a prophet.

Paul will use similar language to refer to how Christ ascended on high and gave gifts to men – "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,

to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God..." (Eph 4:11-13)

Indeed, Paul uses similar language of himself in Galatians 1:15 – "But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me..."

Such are God's purposes – and his sovereignty over history – and such is our confidence – because if God has known us from before the foundation of the world (Eph 1), then surely, he will accomplish his purpose for us!

b. "I Am with You to Deliver You" – The Confidence of the Prophet (v6-8)

Have you ever noticed that Jeremiah's response sounds a lot like the response of Moses? Moses had said that he did not know how to speak! And the LORD did not appreciate that response. But this is important! Moses was plainly trying to get out of doing what God said. ("Please send someone else!" Exodus 4:13) Jeremiah was simply young and scared. And so: 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Deuteronomy 18:18 had said of the prophet like Moses, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

Jeremiah is called to be such a prophet. And with the call also comes the assurance: 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." When the king declares that you are a traitor, when the priests declare that you are a heretic, when the princes throw you in a pit, what is there to be afraid of? I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD. And in confirmation of this:

c. "I Have Set You Over Nations and Kingdoms" – The Task of the Prophet (v9-10)

As the LORD had done to Isaiah in Isaiah 6, so now he does to Jeremiah. Not only does God speak to his servant – he also puts out his hand and touches his servant. In your baptism, God has placed his hand on your head and claimed you as his own. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. Deuteronomy 18:18 said, "I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him."

The call of Jeremiah clearly presents the prophet as a prophet like Moses. But Jeremiah is not just a prophet for Israel: The six verbs of verse 10 will reappear over and over again throughout the book. "to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant." In chapter 12, in chapter 18, in chapter 24, in chapter 31, in chapter 42, and in chapter 45 – and more subtly many other times as well! In Jeremiah 31:27-28, at the heart of the book, we hear, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD." And then, in Jeremiah

31:31, the LORD adds, “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” [and he goes on to make clear that this will be a better covenant than the covenant at Sinai.] Jeremiah will pluck up and break down – destroy and overthrow – but Jeremiah will also build and plant.

God is at work to “create a new alternative community” (Brueggeman, 17) – but in order to do that, God must first tear down the old patterns of thought and practice. Indeed, you find the breaking down of the old, and the building and planting of the new in the text of Jeremiah itself! First, in the words of Walter Brueggemann: “The governing paradigm for the tradition of Jeremiah is Israel’s covenant with Yahweh, rooted in the memories and mandates of the Sinai tradition. That covenant taught that the sovereign God of Israel required obedience to covenant stipulations about social practice and power. Disobedience to those covenant stipulations would result in heavy sanctions (curses) that would be experienced as death or displacement. . . . The book of Jeremiah thus mediates the reality of imperial politics through the theological claims of covenant.” (Brueggemann, 3)

But Jeremiah had to get at that covenant theology by attacking a sort of Davidic exceptionalism. The Jerusalem establishment claimed that “the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy, had taken up permanent residence in Jerusalem, and was for all time a patron and guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment.” Jeremiah rejects this. There is no immunity for the house of David!

But Jeremiah’s message is not merely one of covenant lawsuit – curses and disaster. “In spite of Israel’s obduracy and recalcitrance (as Brueggemann puts it), Yahweh nonetheless wills a continuing relation with Israel. This will is rooted in nothing other than God’s inexplicable yearning, which is articulated in Jeremiah as God’s pathos, presented in turn through the pathos of the poet. . . . The juxtaposition of covenant claim and pathos makes clear that God is, in the life of Judah, more complex, free, and less controllable than a simple scheme of retribution would suggest. . . . The theological richness of Yahweh’s character evokes and requires a subtle rhetoric that is full of ambiguity, passion, and incongruity.”

Jeremiah will tear down the royal-priestly ideology of Davidic exceptionalism. Too often American Christians have tried to craft a story of American exceptionalism – that the United States is God’s chosen nation. Jeremiah is God’s prophet to the nations – to the Goyim (the Gentiles!). And he warns us that as God does to his own nation, so he will do to us. There is no way to glory – except by way of the cross.

2. The Wordplay of the LORD Came to Me (v11-19)

a. The LORD Is Watching Over His Word (v11-12)

Those who love wordplays will enjoy verses 11-19. We start with a pun in verses 11 and 12. The Hebrew word for almond is *shaqed*. The Hebrew word for watching is *shoqed*. 9 The LORD is watching – he is watching over his word to do it. Indeed, in Jeremiah 31:28, the LORD says, “it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them

to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.” The LORD is watching over his word – both in judgment, as God brings the curses of the covenant upon Israel and Judah, and in mercy, as God establishes a new covenant in order to bless Israel and Judah. God is watching carefully – to make sure that his word comes to pass. In chapter 5, Jeremiah will speak of a leopard watching carefully waiting for someone to come out of the city so that he can devour them. And later, in chapter 44, God will say that he is watching over those who flee to Egypt “for evil and not for good.” The word of the LORD – both in blessing and in cursing – will come to pass – because the LORD himself is watching to make sure.

We don’t like thinking about the bad stuff. We don’t like to admit that God himself is the one who brings disaster – but that is why we hear verses 13-16:

b. The LORD Is Bringing Evil from the North (v13-16)

The word “disaster” is simply the Hebrew word for “evil.” It means “bad things”! A thing can be evil without being sinful. God is not sinning against Judah by bringing evil upon Jerusalem. Rather, he is bringing justice – vengeance upon their sin. Justice may well entail catastrophic evil (I think that it is safe to say that the annihilation of the city of Sodom by fire from heaven was an unmitigated disaster!). We’ll come back to this – because the theme of disaster from the north runs through the book of Jeremiah in three distinct phases. First, in chapters 3, 4, 6, 10, and 13, disaster (or evil) repeatedly comes from the north against Jerusalem. Then, four times, in 16:15, 23:8, 25:9, and 31:8, Jeremiah says that God will restore the people of Israel from the north country where he had driven them. And then nine times in chapters 46-52, God speaks of how disaster from the north will come against Judah’s enemies – even Babylon. It’s especially interesting that there is no overlap in this!

Even though the book of Jeremiah has quite a bit of back and forth – the theme of the “north” shows the overall shape of the book: First, there will be disaster from the north upon Jerusalem. Second, God will restore his people from the north country. Third, God will bring disaster from the north on his enemies. Here in chapter 1, we are focused upon Jerusalem: 15 For behold, I am calling all the tribes of the kingdoms of the north, declares the LORD, and they shall come, and every one shall set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, against all its walls all around and against all the cities of Judah. 16 And I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands. Verse 16 declares the reason for God’s judgment against Jerusalem: “I will declare my judgments against them, for all their evil in forsaking me. They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.” Jeremiah will speak of many other sins of Israel and Judah. But every other sin is rooted in a lack of love for God. “Forsaking the LORD” is the starting point for every other sin. If you always remember and love the LORD your God, then you would not turn away from him and forsake him! Instead of worshiping and serving the Creator, they worship the works of their own hands. Their confidence is in their own ability to manipulate the system – to “get things done” – and so they do not trust the LORD. We are so much like

our fathers! We think that we know what it would look like for God to bless us! God's blessing would mean that my situation in life got easier: that my job situation improves, that my uncle doesn't die, that my friends understand me. And what is more, we think that we know how to secure these blessings! If you take these steps – make sure that you “get in good” with these people – follow this diet, do all the “right things”... That's precisely what the Jerusalem establishment is doing! The pro-Assyrian party (later known as the pro-Egyptian party, after Assyria was wiped out!) thinks that an alliance with Egypt will save us. After all, Josiah was pro-Babylonian – and he was killed in battle against the Egyptians – demonstrating that God disapproved of Josiah's pro-Babylonian policy! Right? We're pretty good at covering our self-serving agendas with a veneer of religiosity. The only hope for maintaining an independent Jerusalem is to ally with Egypt. And since God wants an independent Jerusalem, we must ally with Egypt! “They have made offerings to other gods and worshiped the works of their own hands.” Stop! Listen to what God says: “I am watching over my word to perform it.” And finally, the LORD calls Jeremiah to action:

c. “I Am with You” – The Invincible Prophet (v17-19)

Jeremiah is called to bear this “unbearable word” to a hostile and pugnacious people. If they were an unresponsive audience, that would be discouraging, but the LORD says that they will respond. They will respond by fighting against you. But the LORD is watching over his word to perform it. And the sign that God promises is that “they shall not prevail against you.” The gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's church. 12 “I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls.” Jeremiah will be the invincible prophet. But notice how this works. They shall not prevail against you – “for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.” God does not promise anything other than his presence. As we go through the book of Jeremiah, we will often see the prophet at the peril of his life. God's protection often must have seemed flimsy and insubstantial. Seriously? I'm going to survive this? But if all that you have is the presence of God, you have enough. “If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31-32) And if God is with us – then how can we be dismayed by anything? In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14)

TEXT: Jeremiah 2:1 - 3:5

TITLE: *INDICTMENT FOR IDOLATRY, IMMORALITY AND INCOMPREHENSIBLE APOSTASY*

BIG IDEA:

FORSAKING THE LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN OF THE ONE TRUE GOD FOR BROKEN CISTERNS MAKES ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE

INTRODUCTION:

There is no nation in the ancient world that had it so good as the nation of Israel; yet no nation was so foolish in turning away from the gracious provision and protection of their covenant-keeping God to emptiness and futility and ultimately bondage to pagan enemies. Chapter 2 documents God's legal case against His chosen people. It reads like a divorce document – giving the grounds for how the faithful partner has been rejected by spiritual harlotry and unimaginable betrayal. Yet despite this scathing indictment, God stops short of turning his back on faithless Judah forever. For in the remainder of chapter 3 He will lovingly call His wayward people to repentance. The shocking response of the people, led astray by leaders who have miserably failed in their shepherding responsibilities, is to continue to plead their innocence and complain against the fairness of God rather than humbling themselves with a broken and contrite heart in acknowledgement of their rebellion and idolatry.

Feinberg: There is general agreement that chapters 2-6 form a connected message, coming probably from Josiah's reign and in the early years of Jeremiah's ministry.

FORSAKING THE LIFE-GIVING FOUNTAIN OF THE ONE TRUE GOD FOR BROKEN CISTERNS MAKES NO SENSE ON MANY LEVELS

We are going to see a wide range of **metaphors** used in this passage to represent the incomprehensible backsliding and apostasy of a privileged people.

I. (:1-8) CONTRAST BETWEEN DEVOTION AND DESERTION

A. (:1-3a) Devotion -- Pleasant Memories – 5 Words of Commendation for Jerusalem

“Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Go and proclaim in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the LORD, I remember concerning you’”

Parunak: Cf. **Lev. 26:44,45**. There God promises that even though Israel should break his covenant, yet he will remember it for their sake. Same expression here, and sketches out the whole direction of the book!

1. Loyalty
“the devotion of your youth,”

Mackay: *hesed* is an inner devotion that manifests itself in acts of loyalty.

2. Love
“*The love of your betrothals,*”
3. Dedication / Perseverance
“*Your following after Me in the wilderness, Through a land not sown.*”

Mackay: It was a testimony to the strength of their commitment that they had been prepared to leave the agriculturally well-endowed land of Egypt and embark on such a nomadic lifestyle because the Lord directed them.

4. Holiness
“*Israel was holy to the LORD,*”
5. Fruitfulness
“*The first of His harvest;*”

Bob Utley: This imagery is an allusion to the offering of the first fruits which symbolized YHWH's ownership of the whole crop (cf. **Lev. 23:10-11; I Cor. 15:20; James 1:18**). Here the imagery turns negative. The nations attacked and rejected YHWH by rejecting His chosen vessel of revelation, Israel.

B. (:3b-8) Desertion -- Perverted Missteps -- Flipping the Script

1. (:3b) Summary Condemnation
“*All who ate of it became guilty;
Evil came upon them,’ declares the LORD.*”
2. (:4) Call to Attention
“*Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, and all the families of
the house of Israel.*”

Constable: The general flow of thought in this early part of Jeremiah's message is: from Israel's early devotion to Yahweh (**Jeremiah 2:2-3**), to her departure from Him (**Jeremiah 2:4-13**), to the tragic results of her unfaithfulness (**Jeremiah 2:14-19**). In this second pericope, the irrationality of Israel's apostasy stands out.

3. (:5-8) Detailed Condemnation
 - a. (:5) Following After Vanity
“*Thus says the LORD, ‘What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty?’*”

Cf. Micah 6:3

- b. (:6-7) Forgetting God's Blessings
“*And they did not say, ‘Where is the LORD Who brought us up*

out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of deserts and of pits, Through a land of drought and of deep darkness, Through a land that no one crossed And where no man dwelt?' And I brought you into the fruitful land, To eat its fruit and its good things. But you came and defiled My land, And My inheritance you made an abomination."

Reminder that God led the Israelites through the desert wilderness. It's inhospitable. It's dangerous. There's no water. There's usually no food.

Mackay: So infatuated had their fathers become with the emptiness and moral laxity of idol worship that they forgot not only the Lord's past blessings to the people but also the ongoing requirement of seeking the Lord's presence in every part of their lives.

Ryken: Picture of God as a faithful husband:

- Had passion for his bride
- Protected his bride
- Provided for his bride

- c. (:8) Failing to Provide Godly Leadership – Priests / Rulers / Prophets
"The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me, And the prophets prophesied by Baal And walked after things that did not profit."

Constable: The priests should have encouraged the people to be faithful to the covenant and should have kept the sacrificial system pure. The governmental rulers (lit. shepherds) should have directed the people to the Lord rather than away from Him. And many professing prophets, instead of bringing messages from the Lord, brought alleged directions from Baal and followed vain pursuits.

II. (:9-19) CONSEQUENCES OF FORSAKING THE ONE TRUE GOD

A. (:9-13) Shocking Exchange

1. (:9) Antagonizing God

"Therefore I will yet contend with you,' declares the LORD, 'And with your sons' sons I will contend."

2. (:10-12) Exchanging Glory for Futility

"For cross to the coastlands of Kittim and see, And send to Kedar and observe closely, And see if there has been such a thing as this! Has a nation changed gods, When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD."

Parunak: The two places mentioned are a merism, spanning east to west.

- a> Chittim: a city on Cyprus, later comes to be a term for Cyprus, Greece, and westward.
- b> Kedar: an Arabian tribe to the east.

These countries worship gods that are not real gods, but still they would never trade them. But Israel has thrown away the one true God!

David Guzik:

- First this is an **astonishment**, that men can be so foolish, disloyal, and ungrateful.
- Then it is something to **fear**, because a righteous God must answer such outrageous rebellion.
- Finally, it is a **desolation**, because the result of judgment upon such rebellious people will leave little behind.

3. (:13) Exchanging Fullness of Life for Emptiness

“For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.”

David Guzik: In the ancient near east a fountain of living waters – an artesian spring – was something special. It was a constant supply of good, fresh, life-giving water that came to you! In ancient Israel, water was a lot of work, but a fountain of living waters brought it right to you.

Explainingthebook.com: Pictures of God-Swapping

1) A Fresh Fountain

We have on the one hand a fountain of *fresh clean cool water*. Water that will give life and prevent you from dying of thirst. It will quench your thirst.

2) Broken Wells

On the other hand, we have *cisterns* that collect dingy rain water. And those are fine, if that’s all you have – but these are actually *cracked* and can’t hold even that sparse dirty rain water that manages its way into those cisterns.

The Significance of the Pictures

So, Israel is pictured as forsaking *the fresh wonderful water* for the water that is less than ideal – and which can’t even be collected. The result will be *death by thirst* – when they had all the water they needed available to them.

And in the same way, the Jews rejected their life-giving Lord in exchange for false deities that will leave them dry. A reality to which the normally water-providing heavens bear sad witness.

And that kind of action has consequences. Exchanging God’s glory for idols – *both of the hand and of the heart* – comes at a devastating price – which God details for us in **Jeremiah 2:14-19**.

B. (:14-16) Shameful Effects

1. (:14a) Bondage

“Is Israel a slave? Or is he a homeborn servant?”

Mackay: it was by their defection from the ways of the Lord that the fortunes of Israel deteriorated in such a sorry way. They had been seized by their enemies, deported from their land, and their goods and resources spoiled.

2. (:14b-15) Destruction

“Why has he become a prey? The young lions have roared at him, They have roared loudly. And they have made his land a waste; His cities have been destroyed, without inhabitant.”

Parunak: Application: Like Israel, we are God's possession, and under his protection. But remember that this is only the start. Israel came to presume on God's protection, and as a result fell under his chastisement. Other nations that could never have touched her, now were given free rein over her. So we must not presume upon the security that God gives us.

3. (:16) Disgrace

“Also the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes Have shaved the crown of your head.”

C. (:17-19) Shattered End

1. (:17) Nobody to Blame But Yourself

“Have you not done this to yourself, By your forsaking the LORD your God, When He led you in the way?”

2. (:18) Nowhere to Turn for Deliverance

a. (:18a) Trusting in Egypt

“But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt, To drink the waters of the Nile?”

b. (:18b) Trusting in Assyria

“Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria, To drink the waters of the Euphrates?”

3. (:19) No Fear of God to Prevent Your Sinful Self Destruction

“Your own wickedness will correct you, And your apostasies will reprove you; Know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter For you to forsake the LORD your God, And the dread of Me is not in you,’ declares the Lord God of hosts.”

Constable: The consequences of the people's own wickedness and apostasies would come back on them and plague them. This should teach them that it was morally evil and experientially bitter for them to abandon Yahweh their God. All these bad things

happened to them because they did not fear the Lord.

Wiersbe: God punishes us by allowing our own sins to bring pain and discipline to our lives. . . The greatest judgment God can send to disobedient people is to let them have their own way and reap the sad, painful consequences of their sins.

III. (:20-37) CLAIM OF INNOCENCE REFUTED BY UNFAITHFULNESS – 3 Condemning Questions for Jerusalem:

A. (:20-25) How Can You Claim Innocence?

1. (:20-21) Disconnect Between Blessing and Rebellion

a. (:20) Liberation vs. Harlotry

“For long ago I broke your yoke And tore off your bonds; But you said, ‘I will not serve!’ For on every high hill And under every green tree You have lain down as a harlot.”

David Guzik: Many of the pagan and Canaanite idols worshipped by the Israelites were essentially sex cults, honored with ritual prostitution. Their idolatry was often connected with sexual immorality with the use of male and female prostitutes.

b. (:21) Nurturing vs. Degenerate Behavior

“Yet I planted you a choice vine, A completely faithful seed. How then have you turned yourself before Me Into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?”

Bob Utley: metaphors used to describe Israel's apostasy:

1. a rebellious animal, **v. 20a** -- a wild camel in heat, **vv. 23-24**
2. a prostitute, **v. 20b** -- a fool bent on self-destruction, **v. 25**
3. a worthless vine from good stock, **v. 21** -- a thief, **v. 26**
4. a guilty person who cannot be washed, **v. 22**

2. (:22-23a) Defilement Cannot Be Denied

*“‘Although you wash yourself with lye And use much soap, The stain of your iniquity is before Me,’ declares the Lord God. **How can you say, ‘I am not defiled, I have not gone after the Baals’?** Look at your way in the valley! Know what you have done!”*

Parunak: "See thy way in the Valley [of Hinnom]." Look at the path you have worn in the grass, on your way to the pagan altars. How can you say such a thing? The picture is that of a little boy, with his hand in the cookie jar, saying, "I wasn't taking any cookies."

3. (:23b-25) Desertion Characterizes Your Wild Ways

“You are a swift young camel entangling her ways, A wild donkey accustomed to the wilderness, That sniffs the wind in her passion. In the time of her heat who can turn her away? All who seek her will not become weary; In her month they will find her. Keep your feet from being unshod And your throat from thirst; But

you said, 'It is hopeless! No! For I have loved strangers, And after them I will walk.'"

Images of animals in heat – out of control as they pursue their fleshly lusts

Thompson: An understanding of the text involves an understanding of the behavior of these two animals. Young female camels are altogether unreliable, ungainly, and easily disturbed, so that they dash about in an apparently disorganized fashion... The female camel in heat is very mild and gives little evidence of the fact. By contrast the female ass in heat is almost violent. She sniffs the path in front of her trying to pick up the scent of a male (from his urine). Then she races down the road in search of the male. . . The two pictures then combine to describe Israel as unreliable in the extreme and captivated, enslaved and driven on by a fierce passion to seek the gods of Canaan. She is like a young female camel that cannot walk straight and also like the female wild ass that cannot be diverted from racing straight to her sexual goal. Neither is responsible or reliable.

Parunak: Application: These are very graphic pictures of the zeal with which the wicked run after sin. They should caution us about our enthusiasm for sin. But they should equally rebuke us for our lack of enthusiasm for serving the Lord! We would not use these same images; Jeremiah has chosen them for their vulgarity, with good effect. But does our zeal for the Lord come anywhere near the unbeliever's zeal for sin and wickedness?

B. (:26-30) How Can You Argue with the Fairness of God's Judgment?

1. (:26-28) Idolatry Brings Shame (Starting from the Leadership on Down) – and Cannot Save
 - a. (:26-27a) Idolatry Brings Shame

“As the thief is shamed when he is discovered, So the house of Israel is shamed; They, their kings, their princes, And their priests, and their prophets, Who say to a tree, 'You are my father,' And to a stone, 'You gave me birth.' For they have turned their back to Me, And not their face;”
 - b. (:27b-28) Idolatry Cannot Save

“But in the time of their trouble they will say, 'Arise and save us.' But where are your gods Which you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you In the time of your trouble; For according to the number of your cities Are your gods, O Judah.”
2. (:29) Indictment for Rebellion Cannot be Contested

*“**Why do you contend with Me?** You have all transgressed against Me,’ declares the LORD.”*
3. (:30) Inflexibility Despite Discipline

“In vain I have struck your sons; They accepted no chastening. Your sword has

devoured your prophets Like a destroying lion.”

C. (:31-37) How Can You Justify Your Independent Spirit?

1. (:31-33) Prone to Wander

*“O generation, heed the word of the LORD. Have I been a wilderness to Israel, Or a land of thick darkness? **Why do My people say, 'We are free to roam; We will come no more to Thee'?** Can a virgin forget her ornaments, Or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me Days without number. How well you prepare your way To seek love! Therefore even the wicked women You have taught your ways.”*

David Guzik: God’s people were guilty of pride, believing they didn’t need to come and humble themselves before the living God.

Parunak: 33, to "trim one's way," lit. "make it good," is a common expression in Jeremiah for reformation. Cf. 7:3,5; 18:11. But Judah is so perverse that her only reformation is to go further astray, and to "teach her ways wickedness," to become more consistent in sin. She is not basically good with just a little evil, but basically evil and now weeding out the remaining good.

Thompson: Yet, although Yahweh was the source of victory, hope, and confidence, Israel had turned away and desired to be free, carrying through her own will and determining her own course of action. . . Such waywardness was incomprehensible in the light of all Yahweh’s activity on behalf of his people.

2. (:34-35) Protesting Innocence

“Also on your skirts is found The lifeblood of the innocent poor; You did not find them breaking in. But in spite of all these things, Yet you said, 'I am innocent; Surely His anger is turned away from me.' Behold, I will enter into judgment with you Because you say, 'I have not sinned.'”

3. (:36-37) Pronouncing Captivity

“Why do you go around so much Changing your way? Also, you shall be put to shame by Egypt As you were put to shame by Assyria. From this place also you shall go out With your hands on your head; For the LORD has rejected those in whom you trust, And you shall not prosper with them.”

David Guzik: God promised to bring their trust in Egypt to nothing, and (without national repentance) they would go forth from Judah as captive slaves, with your hands on your head. God would not honor their alliances with Egypt or any other foreign power.

IV. (3:1-5) COMPLICATIONS ARISING FROM SPIRITUAL HARLOTRY

5 Key Questions – Who, What, Why, When, How

A. (3:1) What Possibility of Reunion?

“God says, ‘If a husband divorces his wife, And she goes from him, And belongs to another man, Will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted? But you are a harlot with many lovers; Yet you turn to Me,’ declares the LORD.”

Mackay: the section begins by exploring the implications of divorce for a subsequent resumption of the marriage relationship, and so poses the questions of how the people and the Lord may be reunited in the bond of the covenant. Initially the argument is not encouraging because, judged by human possibilities and even by the standards of the Lord himself in the Mosaic law, it does not seem possible.

B. (3:2) How Pervasive is the Pollution?

“Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see; Where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them Like an Arab in the desert, And you have polluted a land With your harlotry and with your wickedness.”

C. (3:3) Why No Shame Despite the Withholding of Blessing?

“Therefore the showers have been withheld, And there has been no spring rain. Yet you had a harlot's forehead; You refused to be ashamed.”

D. (3:4) When Will Reconciliation Be Possible?

“Have you not just now called to Me, ‘My Father, Thou art the friend of my youth? Will He be angry forever? Will He be indignant to the end?’”

E. (3:5) Who is to Blame?

“Behold, you have spoken And have done evil things, And you have had your way.”

Kidner: This wife, this kingdom of Judah, was no passive shuttlecock between one husband and another, but brazenly promiscuous, installing her lovers, her gods and goddesses, on every hilltop (2), to charm the rain out of the sky and the corn out of the earth in the time-honoured way of Canaan. What made it insufferable was the pious talk that went with it, appealing to Yahweh’s fatherhood, friendship and forbearance (4-5); talk which only added hypocrisy to infidelity.

CONCLUSION:

The elect nation has nobody to blame but themselves. They have exchanged the glory of the majestic God for broken cisterns that cannot even hold the stagnant rain water that might accumulate – much less match the fountain of living waters provided by the Spirit of God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What **words of commendation** would the Lord issue to you? (Similar to positive

statements to seven churches in book of Revelations.)

2) Where has your sin proven to have long term harmful consequences?

3) Where are you tempted to turn to for deliverance (your Egypt and Assyria)?

4) What are some present day examples of incomprehensible apostasy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Bob Utley: The change in the pronouns has caused some to assert that there are several sermons combined, but it seems that Jeremiah switches from speaking to the nation, to individuals and then back to the nation.

Brian Bell: 10 Pictures that expose the unfaithfulness and sins of the people:

1. An Unfaithful Wife (1-8)
2. Broken Cisterns! (9-13)
3. A Plundered Slave! (14-19)
4. A Harlot! (20)
5. A Degenerated Vine! (21)
6. A Stained Body! (22)
7. A Swift Camel & A Donkey in Heat! (23-25)
8. A Disgraced Thief! (26-28)
9. Uncontrollable Children! (29-35)
10. Prisoners of War! (36,37)

Craigie: Throughout this oracle, Jeremiah presented Israel's covenant unfaithfulness to God from two perspectives: religious and political. Yahweh's people had abandoned exclusive faith in their covenant God, and had committed spiritual adultery by participating in the Baal fertility cult. Nationally, they had ceased to recognize Yahweh's sovereignty over them, and had turned to Egypt and Assyria for security.

Thompson: In the early days of Israel's covenant (treaty) with Yahweh she was as loyal as a bride. This was to be remembered. Later she entered into other alliances both political and religious. In the world of Jeremiah's day religious loyalties were often involved in a political alliance because the vassals of great kings were required to indicate at least a token acknowledgment of the deities of the overlord (cf. **2 K. 16:10-16**).

Richard Niell Donovan: Ironically, the right-wing of the church today is in the same place that the left-wing was in thirty years ago. Just as the left-wing of the church became an appendage of the Democratic Party, so the right-wing of the church is becoming an appendage of the Republican Party. The line between conservative religion and conservative politics has become very fuzzy. The right-wing of the church

has placed a great deal of faith in the right-wing of Congress.

At what point does that become idolatry? It becomes idolatry when we begin to believe more strongly in secular power than in God's power—when we put something other than God on God's throne. That is now happening in the right-wing of the church, just as it already happened in the left-wing. I will dust off my crystal ball and predict that, within two decades, both the conservative churches and the Republican Party will be sorry that they ever met.

Let me be clear. I am not preaching about politics—or even politics and religion; I am preaching about idolatry—putting something other than God in first place in our lives and beliefs. That is what idolatry is!

When we love sex—or alcohol—or money [cf. SAM missile illustration] —or health more than we love God, they will betray us. When we believe in secular power more than we believe in God's power, it will betray us.

Jeremiah called the people of Israel to love God and to put him in first place in their lives.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/jeremiah-21-13-cracked-cisterns-donovan/>

John Piper: God Does Not Divorce

The covenant people of God are his wife. They have often been faithless and broken the marriage covenant. Would God — could God — divorce his wife? No!

I will betroth you to me forever, I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord. (Hosea 2:19–20)

But what of her horrible adulteries? Surely divorce is legitimate here! Israel is an “adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband” (**Ezekiel 16:14**).

Now what? Separation? Judgment? Yes: “*I will give you into the hand of your lovers . . . and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces. . . . I will make you stop playing the harlot*” (**16:39**).

But is that all? Is the separation final? Does he divorce her? No!

Yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant . . . I will forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord God. (Ezekiel 16:60, 63)

But is it not wrong to take her back after she has lain with so many others? “*You have played the harlot with many lovers, and would you return to me?*” (**Jeremiah 3:1**).

Ah, but what a husband he is! Incredible in grace! “*Return, faithless Israel, says the Lord. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, says the Lord*” (**3:12**).

God will not divorce. *“I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel”* (**Malachi 2:16**).

God is wholly committed to saving and enriching his marriage!

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-does-not-divorce>

Executableoutlines.com: ARE WE HEWING BROKEN CISTERNS...?

1. We can be guilty of going after false gods today - cf. **Ep 5:5; Col 3:5**
 - a. Such as materialism and immorality
 - b. Which is a form of idolatry

2. We can be guilty of heeding false prophets (teachers) - cf. **2 Pe 2:1-3**
 - a. Who lead us into denominationalism or sectarianism
 - b. Contrary to Jesus' prayer and the unity of the Spirit - cf. **Jn 17:20-21**; <http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Ep 4.3-6>
 - c. Others who offer false hopes: e.g., new agers, false religions, get rich quick schemers

3. We can be guilty of a false sense of prosperity - cf. **Re 3:17-18**
 - a. Believing we are spiritually secure
 - b. When we are in grave danger of falling - cf. **1Co 10:12**

-- We can be guilty of leaving God for a poor substitute of true religion!

Mackay: So here, Jeremiah before moving on to call the people to repentance in the following chapter, first of all establishes that their conduct has fallen far short of what was required of them.

- In **vv. 1-3** the standard that was expected of them is described; in the following six sections of the chapter instances are given of various ways in which their behavior was deficient.
- In **vv. 4-8** the focus is on their forgetfulness of what the Lord had done for them and given to them;
- In **vv. 9-13** the Lord sets out his complaint that in abandoning him Israel had sinned more heinously than the heathen nations;
- The warning given to Judah through what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel is presented in **vv. 14-19**;
- The extent to which rebellious behavior had become part of the national character is vividly exemplified in **vv. 20-25**;
- The disgrace they have brought upon themselves is described in **vv. 26-28**;
- And finally there is a rebuttal for the people's protestations regarding their conduct (**vv. 29-37**)

Peter Wallace: The Passion of the Impassible God

Introduction: The Honeymoon in the Wilderness (2:1-3)

Wait! Doesn't Jeremiah know that the wilderness generation rebelled? Israel in the wilderness was like a child in the terrible twos! Always throwing tantrums and fits.

Grumbling and moaning about the food. “Are we there yet?!” How can God say “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness...”

Well, compared to how Israel and Judah have treated God recently, the wilderness was a honeymoon! Sure, Israel would grumble and throw tantrums and fits! But when the pillar of cloud and fire arose and led Israel through the wilderness – Israel followed! They said that they wanted to go back to Egypt – but when push came to shove, the LORD led them – and they followed! Compared to what came later, that’s devotion!

And verse 3 describes the result: Because Israel was holy to the LORD, “the firstfruits of his harvest.” The principle of the firstfruits is that you give the LORD the first portion of the harvest in recognition that all the harvest belongs to God. You can hear in Jeremiah’s language the echo of the promise to Abraham that in his seed, all the nations would be blessed. Israel’s holiness is as the firstfruits to the harvest.

It’s what Paul says repeatedly in Romans: “to the Jew first – and also to the Greek...” And the firstfruits are holy to the LORD. All who ate of it incurred guilt – in other words, if someone devoured Israel – disaster (evil) came upon them. This is the standard covenant theology that all Israel would recognize and approve. We are God’s people, therefore when people do bad things to us, God will bring bad things on them.

Chapter 2 consists of two recountings of Israel’s story – from the Exodus to Jeremiah’s present. Each of these two retellings contains four parallel parts:

- 1) God’s faithfulness in the Exodus
- 2) the failure of Israel’s prophets, priests, and kings
- 3) the covenant lawsuit – as God and Israel “contend” with one another
- 4) There is no gain in trusting Assyria and Egypt for help

What is the point of the repetition? It helps to hear the same basic point twice.

But also, there is movement in the repetition.

The “A” sequence focuses on idolatry and apostasy: Israel has exchanged the glory of God for idols.

The “B” sequence starts to apply where idolatry and apostasy goes: Israel has exchanged the truth of God for a lie. The first point for you – the point of verses 4-19 – is simply this: do not forget – do not forsake – the LORD.

A. What Did I Do Wrong, That You Forsook Me for Assyria and Egypt? (2:4-19)

God starts by asking (verse 5):

1. What Did I, the God of the Exodus, Do to Deserve This? (2:5-7a)

Incidentally, the word translated “worthless” is the word *hebel* – the same word used in Ecclesiastes: they went after vapor and became vapor – they went after vanity and became vanity. Here is an example of how ‘hebel’ – vanity – is used in the context of idolatry. You seek *hebel* – you will become *hebel*. You become what you worship. Whatever you set your heart on – that is what you will become! And so, if you want to know what you worship, just ask yourself, what am I becoming? It’s a dangerous

question to ask yourself. It's not always a pretty answer. And sometimes the best way to get at the answer is to ask other people. How have I changed? What do you see in my life over the months and years? Clearly, time has revealed that Israel has changed for the worse.

At the heart of verses 4-19 is the question: "What are you drinking?" Water is rare and precious in the middle east and so your source of water is your source of life. The LORD brought Israel out of Egypt – through the wilderness, a land of desert and pits, a land of drought and deep darkness, a land that none passes through, where no man dwells. If the LORD had not provided water from the rock – Israel would have died of thirst. I brought you out of Egypt – to a land exceedingly good – I led you through the wilderness – and provided for you in every situation. So what are you drinking? What is your source of life?

2. The Priests, Shepherds, and Prophets Did Not Ask 'Where Is the LORD?'

Notice the four things that Jeremiah highlights:

First, the priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' It's so easy for religious leaders to confuse their agenda with God's agenda. Where is the LORD? If you lose sight of where he is, then you will be in the wrong place!

Second, those who handle (or wield) the law did not know me. If you know the Bible inside and out – but you do not know God – then you won't know how to use the Bible.

Third, the shepherds transgressed against me. David was the shepherd-king. But the sons of David – the shepherds of Israel – have forgotten that power is a trust. They should not be using their authority for their own benefit.

Fourth, the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.

What do all of these failures have in common? They have displaced God. The leaders in Jerusalem are preoccupied with keeping people alive. That's a good thing – right? No, it's not. I think of a man I dearly love who is so obsessed with staying alive that he is destroying his life! I think of a woman I know who is so obsessed with how her children turn out that she is destroying her children! I even think of a pastor who is so obsessed with preaching Bible content that he is destroying his church! There is nothing so good and so holy that it can displace God! And this is the heart of God's contention with Judah:

3. The LORD Will Contend with Covenant Breakers: the Lawsuit (2:9-13)

In verses 9-13, the LORD brings his charge against Israel. "I still contend with you" – I am bringing my lawsuit against you and your grandchildren And why?

i. Charge – Forsaking the LORD (Exchanging the Truth for a Lie)

It would be shocking to find any nation changing its gods – even if they are not really gods! Verse 11 is the root of what Paul teaches in Romans 1 – when he says that people exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images – and thus they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. (And part 1 of Jeremiah 2 is all about exchanging the glory of God for idols – and part 2 of Jeremiah 2 is all about exchanging the truth of God for a lie!) But this is not just a pagan problem! All through history this keeps on happening!

medieval Christians exchanging the glory of Jesus for Islam – modern Christians exchanging the glory of Jesus for Mormonism or Modernism! Verse 12 calls the heavens as witness. The heavens are often called as witness by the prophets – since the heavens declare the glory of God. The heavens know well the faithfulness of God, because they have seen all that the LORD does on the earth. That great dome above your head – with the sun, moon, and stars fixed in the heavens – bears witness that in all generations God has been faithful – and therefore the heavens are shocked at our fickleness!

ii. Witnesses – the Nations and the Heavens

The two evils are closely related: 1) they have forsaken the spring of living water, and 2) dug out for themselves broken cisterns I want you to think about the ludicrous situation that God describes: There is a spring – a fountain of living waters – that is plentifully available to you; A spring provides the best, freshest sort of water available! which further, requires no work on your part to obtain the water, other than to avail yourself of it! So what are you drinking? But instead, you say, “No, I’d rather dig a cistern.” So you spend all your time and energy digging a cistern – a deep, big hole in the ground, designed to trap and hold rainwater. Cisterns provide the worst sort of water – and further, since the water in a cistern is stagnant, they attract insects and frogs.

(When I was in Eritrea, my water supply came from a cistern – I had to go every morning and fill my bucket with water from the cistern. As you lower the bucket into the cistern, you try to avoid the dead frogs that are floating on the surface, it’s harder to avoid the living frogs that leap into your bucket... I came to appreciate those frogs. After all, those frogs were a great reminder to always boil your water!!) But Israel wasn’t very good at digging cisterns – so when you are sealing the bottom of the cistern, you leave a big crack in the ground. And so all the water that flows into your cistern, simply seeps into

Do you hear what Jeremiah is saying? God graciously and freely provides living water You don’t have to do anything to get it – no digging, no plastering – no buckets, no frogs... Only one thing is required. You must go to the spring and drink. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest! And yet, we did not come. We have forsaken the LORD... So what are you drinking?

4. What Do You Gain? Forsaking the LORD to Seek Egypt or Assyria Is Evil and Bitter (2:14-19)

The key to verses 14-19 is the repetition of the work “to forsake” in verses 17 and 19 – the same word used in verse 13 – they have forsaken me – they have forsaken the LORD their God. This is the heart of the LORD’s charge against Israel. And this what has brought destruction upon themselves. And Jeremiah continues with the water theme. Water, after all, is necessary for life. Your source of water is your source of life. But rather than drink of the living water that flows from the LORD their God, they are going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile – just as Manasseh had gone to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates. What are you drinking? There is a river of living water that flows from the heart of Jesus to his people. If anyone is thirsty, let him come

to me and drink!

B. How Did It Happen? The Consequences of Forsaking the LORD (2:20-37)

Part two – in verses 20-37 – consists of an imagined dialogue between the LORD and his people, starting, once more, with the Exodus. Judah makes seven assertions in these verses: “I will not serve” (verse 20) “I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals” (verse 23) “It is hopeless...” – essentially “I can’t help it!” (verse 25) they say to a tree, “You are my father” and to a stone “You gave me birth” (verse 27) they say to their new gods, “Arise and save us” (verse 27) but to the LORD they say, “We are free, we will come no more to you” (verse 31) “I am innocent; surely God’s anger has turned from me” (verse 35) Everything Judah says is false. When you exchange the glory of God for idols, you will also exchange the truth of God for a lie. Sin is always rooted in lies. Which lies are you tempted to believe?

1. I Broke Your Yoke/Planted a Choice Vine, But You Have Loved Foreigners (2:20-25)

God has set us free in Christ Jesus! You are no longer the old sinner that you used to be! You are free! And we are tempted in the same way. We are tempted to use our freedom to pursue our own selfish pleasures. When God set Israel free from Egypt, the response he often got was, “No one’s gonna tell me what to do!” But in the immortal words of Bob Dylan, “You gotta serve somebody” – and if you refuse to serve the Lord Jesus Christ you will serve something or someone else. Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore. But it is for freedom that Christ has set you free! [read] 21 Yet I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? 22 Though you wash yourself with I can’t help it. I love sin too much. It’s too late for me... Do not believe the lies of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Okay, fine, so you have loved foreigners. You have not loved the LORD your God with all your heart. Repent! Because if you don’t – if you turn to other gods – then you will be put to shame. [don’t read]

2. If You – and Your Priests, Kings, Officials, Prophets – Want Other Gods, Then Let Them Arise and Save You (2:26-28)

We return to the kings, the officials, the priests, and the prophets. We heard these leaders of God’s people in part one – as they forgot and forsook the LORD. They have turned to the gods of the nations. Manasseh swore allegiance to the gods of Assyria. But will the gods of the nations ‘arise and save’ you?!

3. Why Do You Contend with Me? What Is Your Lawsuit? (2:29-32)

It’s like a bride who forgets to wear her wedding dress! Revelation 19 says that the Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. (19:7-8) The glorious heavenly Zion is a sight for sore eyes after beholding her earthly counterpart! As Jeremiah says in verse 33

4. You Will Not Prosper: Because You Have Shed the Blood of the Innocent, You Shall Be Shamed by Egypt as You Were by Assyria (2:33-37)

While we are perhaps most familiar with the connection between idolatry and adultery (a connection found throughout this passage!), it is important to see the connection between idolatry and murder as well! If you serve other gods, then you are not loving the LORD your God with all your heart. And if you are not loving God with all your heart, then you will not love those who are made in the image of God. Yet in spite of all these things you say, ‘I am innocent; surely his anger has turned from me.’ Here is the seventh and final lie: when the guilty declare themselves innocent! I’m a good person! I do my best. The LORD replies: Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, ‘I have not sinned.’

John builds on this in 1 John 1:10 – “If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” The only way to avoid judgment is if we confess our sins – if we acknowledge that we have sinned – we have not loved God with all our heart – we have not loved one another as Christ commanded.

Notice the contrast between the lie of verse 25 – “It is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go” – and the lie of verse 35 – “I am innocent...I have not sinned.” So which is it? Are you innocent? Or are you a hopeless sinner who cannot help sinning? That’s why Jeremiah says: 36 How much you go about, changing your way! You can’t even make up your mind as to whether you are innocent or guilty! You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. 37 From it too you will come away with your hands on your head, for the LORD has rejected those in whom you trust, and you will not prosper by them.

The very lies that you trusted will put you to shame. Just as Assyria put you to shame in the days of Hezekiah and Manasseh, so now, Egypt will put you to shame. The beginning of ch 3 concludes our text by returning to the theme of the bride and the whore: [just read verse 1]

Conclusion: Would a Man Return to a Whore? (3:1-5)

The tone of these verses suggests that the answer is no. No man in his right mind would return to a woman who had played the whore. The tone of these verses suggests that God would have to be crazy to take Jerusalem back. That’s kind of the point. God is a little nuts. Such is his love for you! He just might be crazy enough to take you back!

Notice – this is not the stupid craziness of star-crossed lovers who don’t really understand what they are doing! God understands exactly what he is doing. He knows exactly what it will cost him. But then again, when God says that Israel’s “devotion” in the wilderness was the high point in their relationship – you know that it’s going to take something crazy to make things right. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

TEXT: Jeremiah 3:6 – 4:4

TITLE: REJECTED CALL TO REPENTANCE

BIG IDEA:

TURN OR BURN – BACKSLIDERS NEED TO REPENT AND RESPOND TO GOD’S GRACIOUS INVITATION TO AVOID EXPERIENCING HIS WRATH

INTRODUCTION:

2nd Message of the book – The Lord’s patience and longsuffering and tender mercy and gracious character is never so evident as when He is pleading with His privileged people to return to faithful covenant obedience. It is shocking and incomprehensible to see the persistent idolatry and spiritual harlotry that both the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel practice. Yet we are reminded of the stubbornness of our own hearts in choosing the temporary pleasures of sin over the lasting joy of fellowship with Christ. How quick we are to turn away from the fountain of living water to the broken cisterns of this world.

Gregg Allen: 3:6 tells us that this prophecy was given in the days of Josiah, king of Judah. Josiah became king after the reigns of his wicked grandfather Manassah (who sinned horribly, but later repented while in captivity), and his father Amon (who sinned as his father had, but who did not learn the lessons of his father's captivity and repent). Josiah was a godly king, who came to the throne while very young. He led his people in a great revival and turned them back to the God of their fathers. But their return to him was only superficial. They, too, did not learn the lessons that had been put on display before them.

In this section, God calls His wayward people, Judah, to look to their wicked sister - the northern kingdom of Israel - and learn a few lessons from her. She had been taken captive by the Assyrians and had been dispersed; yet, if they would but repent, God would forgive them. He uses Israel as an object lesson to call Judah to repentance.

Brian Bell: Sometimes God’s people have an over-inflated sense of their importance. Despite being disciplined, they just don’t get it.

A little boy was overheard talking to himself as he strutted through the backyard, baseball cap in place, toting ball and bat. He was heard to say, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world." Then he tossed the ball into the air, swung at it and missed. "Strike one!" Undaunted he picked up the ball, threw it into the air and said to himself, "I'm the greatest baseball hitter ever," and he swung at the ball again. And again he missed. "Strike two!" He paused a moment to examine his bat and ball carefully. Then a third time he threw the ball into the air. "I'm the greatest hitter who ever lived," he said. He swung the bat hard again, missed a third time. He cried out, "Wow! Strike three! What a pitcher! I'm the greatest pitcher in the world!"

TURN OR BURN – BACKSLIDERS NEED TO REPENT AND RESPOND TO GOD’S GRACIOUS INVITATION TO AVOID EXPERIENCING HIS WRATH

I. (:6-11) INDICTMENT – JUDAH EVEN MORE UNFAITHFUL AND UNREPENTANT THAN ISRAEL

A. (:6-7) Unrepentant Harlotry of Israel

1. (:6) Unfaithful Israel

“Then the LORD said to me in the days of Josiah the king, ‘Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and she was a harlot there.’”

Blatant idolatry on the high places – not hidden sins
Judah should have learned from the sins of Israel

2. (:7) Unrepentant Israel

“And I thought, ‘After she has done all these things, she will return to Me’; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.”

Copy Cat harlotry

Matthew Henry: The treachery of those who pretend to cleave to God will be reckoned for, as well as the apostasy of those who openly revolt from him.

Mackay: “*Sister*” is a reminder of the common origin of the two kingdoms. But despite their links Judah learned no lessons from what had occurred in the north. Up to the time of the capture of the northern kingdom, Judah in the south had remained relatively loyal in her espousal of Yahwism, but not long after the fall of the north the horrendous years of Manasseh’s long reign saw Judah fall far away from the Lord. The reform movement under Josiah seems to have been accompanied by a popular feeling of superiority over the north, which is here combated because Judah had drawn the wrong conclusion that she was exempt from her sister’s fate.

B. (:8-10) Unrepentant Harlotry of Judah

1. (:8-9) Unfaithful Judah

“And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel, I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce, yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear; but she went and was a harlot also. And it came about because of the lightness of her harlotry, that she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.”

Spiritual harlotry pollutes the land

Thompson: The Hebrew text reads literally ‘*through the lightness of adultery*’; that is, adultery mattered so little to her that she participated in the same evil practices as her

sister Israel and polluted the land.

2. (:10) Unrepentant Judah

“And yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,” declares the LORD.”

How can you think you can be successful trying to deceive the God who sees all – who does not look merely on the outward appearance (of prayers and sacrifices and tithes and offerings) but on the heart?

Parunak: 3:6-10 The backbone of the paragraph is a series of three statements about people seeing things: what Jeremiah sees, what Judah sees, and what the Lord sees.

1. **Jeremiah** sees God's dealings with Israel. . .

2. **7c, Judah** sees these dealings, too: Israel's sin, God's gracious offer through the prophets, Israel's refusal, and what is not expressed but certainly lurking in the background, the captivity in Assyria that followed. She knows that God is ready to forgive, but that sin must be judged.

3. **8-10, God** sees Judah's insensitivity to what he has done with Israel.

Constable: Still, Judah did not return to the Lord with heartfelt repentance, but only superficially. Jeremiah began ministering (in 627 B.C.) one year after King Josiah began his spiritual reforms (in 628 B.C.). This oracle may have come early in Jeremiah's ministry before the reforms had taken hold. But the rapidity with which Judah declined following Josiah's death seems to indicate that the reforms produced only a superficial return to the Lord. King Manasseh's long godless reign (697-642 B.C.) was more than Josiah's comparatively brief reforms (628-609 B.C.) could counteract. Though Josiah led the nation in a reformation, the people did not experience a heart-changing revival (cf. **2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28**).

C. (:11) Comparison Between Israel and Judah

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Faithless Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.’”

Quite an indictment!

**II. (:12-18) INVITATION –
TO RECEIVE GOD'S GRACE AND FORGIVENESS IN LOVING
REUNION**

A. (:12-14) Invitation to Israel – Experience Forgiveness Based on God's Grace

*“Go, and proclaim these words toward the north and say, 'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD; 'I will not look upon you in anger. For I am gracious,' declares the LORD; 'I will not be angry forever. Only **acknowledge** your iniquity, That you*

have transgressed against the LORD your God And have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree, And you have not obeyed My voice,' declares the LORD. 'Return, O faithless sons,' declares the LORD; 'For I am a master to you, And I will take you one from a city and two from a family, And I will bring you to Zion.'"

Thompson: There is a neat play on two derivatives of the root *sub* here ... The “backslider” (turn away) is invited to “come back” (turn back). There would be a welcome for her.

Constable: “Return” is a key word in this sermon, as it is in the whole book. There are three specific commands to “Return” in this section (**Jeremiah 3:12; Jeremiah 3:14; Jeremiah 3:22**), as well as numerous other occurrences of the word and its relatives. “Return,” for example, appears nine times in the NASB (**Jeremiah 3:1; Jeremiah 3:7 [twice], 10, 12, 14, 22, Jeremiah 4:1 [twice]**) and “turn” twice (**Jeremiah 3:1; Jeremiah 3:19**).

Parunak: Chiasmic structure around the 3 imperatives here. Note that these promises are not expressed as conditions: “If you turn, I will bless you.” That is a true statement, and we will find instances of it in the book (cf. **4:2**). But the point here is much stronger: “Here are my gracious plans toward you. Therefore turn.” (Note the *kiy* in **v.14**.) God’s blessings here are the MOTIVE for their obedience, not the RESULT. Such are God’s gracious dealings with us. We come to him as recipients of a gift already given, not manipulators trying to change his mind. The initiative is his, not ours.

B. (:15-17) Invitation to Judah – Experience the Security of Submitting to the Shepherd-King

“Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding. And it shall be in those days when you are multiplied and increased in the land,’ declares the LORD, ‘they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD. And it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they miss it, nor shall it be made again. At that time they shall call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem, for the name of the LORD; nor shall they walk anymore after the stubbornness of their evil heart.’”

Flash forward to millennial blessings (God has not cast His people off forever or forgotten His promises to them) in a land where righteousness reigns and everyone is taught the Word of God; faithful shepherds; God ruling from His throne in Jerusalem; all nations submitting; no need to make reference to the localized presence of the ark of the covenant because the majestic presence and glory of the Lord will fill all and dominate all

Utley: “in those days”-- his refers to the New Covenant period (cf. **Jer. 3:16-18; 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:22-38**) or the Messianic age.

Adam Clarke: This symbol of the Divine presence, given to the Jews as a token and pledge of God's dwelling among them, shall be no longer necessary, and shall no longer exist; for in the days of the Messiah, to which this promise seems to relate, God's worship shall not be confined either to one place or to one people. The temple of God shall be among men, and everywhere God be adored through Christ Jesus.

Thompson: It was not that Jeremiah was opposed to symbols in Israel's worship. Material items, whether sacrifices, circumcision, or cultic furniture, were only pointers to spiritual realities and were of value only as long as they led men to the spiritual. Where men remained content with the material items, these became worthless and even dangerous (cf. **7:22-23**).

Mackay: To Jeremiah's hearers used to emphasizing the privileged status of Jerusalem in that it had Temple and ark, it would have been shocking to say that the ark would not exist in future. It would have been tantamount to saying that there would be no religion, no presence of God with his people. But the ark had been popularly redefined into a religious talisman which reinforced an optimism among the people that was unwarranted on the basis of their spiritual conduct. Since a true perception of the ark had been perverted by an automatic, mechanical view of religion, Jeremiah is prophesying that in the restored times he envisages ahead the element of formalism will have vanished and there will be no need for sacramental symbols as a focus for the worship of the people.

Mackay: "*stubbornness of their evil hearts*" – Eight of the ten Old Testament occurrences of "*stubbornness*" (from a root attested in Aramaic with the meaning "to be firmly set") are in Jeremiah. The term describes those who are certain they have the capacity to make decisions for themselves, and once they have made them, there is no deflecting them from their resolution even though it can be shown to be contrary to the way of God.

C. (:18) Combined Restoration in the Land of Promise

"In those days the house of Judah will walk with the house of Israel, and they will come together from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers as an inheritance."

Hearkens back to God's covenant promises

Feinberg: United to God in holiness of life, the two long-divided parts of the nations will finally be reunited to dwell in the land promised to the patriarchs (cf. **Ezek 37**). In summary, the elements of the promise are godly leaders, absence of outward elements of worship, the dwelling of God's presence with them, a godly life, a successful witness to the nations, and a unified nation.

Kidner: If so distant a prospect was worth unveiling to the old Israel, six centuries before Christ, it must be doubly relevant to us who have reached its foothills. Like our predecessors, we shall travel all the better for keeping the journey's end in view,

especially now that the book of Revelation has pictured it for even more invitingly than Jeremiah.

III. (:19-25) LAMENT – FOR SHAMEFUL TREACHERY AND PERVERSION

A. (:19-20) Lament for Treachery

“Then I said, 'How I would set you among My sons, And give you a pleasant land, The most beautiful inheritance of the nations!' And I said, 'You shall call Me, My Father, And not turn away from following Me. Surely, as a woman treacherously departs from her lover, So you have dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,' declares the LORD.”

No faithfulness to the Father-Son relationship;
No faithfulness to the covenant marriage love relationship
Nothing but shocking treachery

Ryken: These verses show that the relationship between God and his people is too rich to be defined by any single human relationship. The Lord reminds his people that they are like unfaithful spouses. But he also compares them to wayward sons who are unworthy of their inheritance. Not only is God a spurned husband, but he is also a disappointed father.

B. (:21-23) Lament for Perversion

“A voice is heard on the bare heights, The weeping and the supplications of the sons of Israel; Because they have perverted their way, They have forgotten the LORD their God. ‘Return, O faithless sons, I will heal your faithlessness. Behold, we come to Thee; For Thou art the LORD our God. Surely, the hills are a deception, A tumult on the mountains. Surely, in the LORD our God Is the salvation of Israel.”

Maclaren: Here is the consciousness of sin in its essential character, and that produces godly sorrow. The distinction between mere remorse and repentance is here already, in the ‘weeping and supplication.’

Jamieson, Fausset, Brown: The scene of their idolatries is the scene of their confessions.

Adam Clarke: Reasons they should return to God:

- Because he is the true God.
- Because the idols did not profit them: they could give no help in time of trouble.
- Because it is the prerogative of God alone to give salvation.
- Because they had no kind of prosperity since they had abandoned the worship of their Maker. And this was not only their case, but it was the case of their forefathers, who all suffered in consequence of their idolatry and disobedience.

Salvation can only be found in the Lord our God; He still extends His gracious invitation

Constable: The Israelites confessed that the hills and mountains on which they had worshipped idols had been sites of deception for them and places of unrest. The idols had not provided what they promised, and instead of finding rest by worshipping them, the Israelites had experienced turmoil. They finally acknowledged that only in Yahweh their God could they find true salvation (cf. **Exodus 20:2-6; Deuteronomy 5:6-10; Deuteronomy 6:4**).

MacArthur: Since the irretrievable dispersion of Israel in the N (722 B.C.) Judah alone was left to be called by the name Israel, as Jeremiah sometimes chose to do (e.g. **3:20-23**).

C. (:24-25) Lament Over the Shame and Humiliation of Disobedience

"But the shameful thing has consumed the labor of our fathers since our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame, and let our humiliation cover us; for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, since our youth even to this day. And we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."

Sorry state of affairs

**IV. (4:1-4) PLEA –
FOR REPENTANCE AND REVIVED COMMITMENT**

A. (:1-2) Plea for Israel to Return – Promotes Divine Blessing

"If you will return, O Israel," declares the LORD, "Then you should return to Me. And if you will put away your detested things from My presence, And will not waver, 2 And you will swear, 'As the LORD lives,' In truth, in justice, and in righteousness; Then the nations will bless themselves in Him, And in Him they will glory."

B. (:3-4) Plea for Judah to Return – Prevents Divine Wrath

For thus says the LORD to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, "Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskins of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Lest My wrath go forth like fire And burn with none to quench it, Because of the evil of your deeds."

Longman: The oracle ends with an ultimatum. On the one hand, they can repent with the implication of restoration. Two metaphors of repentance are used here. One is agricultural. Their hearts are **unplowed**, therefore hard-packed ground and filled with **thorns**, prohibitive of productive growth. He calls on them to **break up** that hard ground of their hearts. Secondly, he demands that they **circumcise** their hearts.

Externally, they would have been circumcised in the flesh (**Gen. 17:14**), but this was to be an external side of an internal reality. They were to obey the covenant and its laws from the hearts (see **Deut. 10:16** and **Jer. 9:25**). The alternative was not pretty. If they did not repent, then they would feel the burning **wrath** of God.

CONCLUSION:

There is always an urgency for the backslidden to repent NOW. Waste no time because you do not want to experience the fierce wrath of God.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What parallels can you draw between marital unfaithfulness and spiritual harlotry?
- 2) How does increased knowledge lead to increased responsibility?
- 3) How gracious and inviting is God to those who are backslidden and still unrepentant?
- 4) What should we be looking forward to experiencing in the Millennial Kingdom?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thompson: The historical fact is that in 722/1 B.C. Samaria fell to the Assyrians (**2 K. 17:1-18**). But even before this, parts of the kingdom of Israel had been lopped off by Assyria (**2 K. 15:29**). In fact, the Assyrians in the days of Tiglath-pileser III (745-726 B.C.) formed three Assyrian provinces from all the territory north of the plain of Jezreel and the Israelite lands in Transjordan, namely, Megiddo, Karnaim, and Gilead. The upper strata of the population were deported and replaced by colonists from distant lands (**2 K. 15:29**). It was a high price to pay for her apostasy.

Matthew Henry: Those are pastors after God's own heart who make it their business to feed the flock, not to feed themselves and fleece the flocks, but to do all they can for the good of those that are under their charge, who feed them with wisdom and understanding (that is, wisely and understandingly), as David fed them, in the integrity of his heart and by the skillfulness of his hand, **Psalm 78:72**. Those who are not only pastors, but teachers, must feed them with the word of God, which is wisdom and understanding, which is able to make us wise to salvation.

Thompson: The themes of “*adultery*” and “*return*” (verb *sub*) recur again and again. The one is concerned with the indictment of Israel for her sin (largely **ch. 2**), the other

with a plea for repentance (largely **ch. 3**). Both themes were taken up early in Jeremiah's ministry, and despite later editing we have here the burden of his early preaching. Both themes characterized his whole ministry, although it became clear as the years passed that repentance would not take place and that judgment was inevitable. The theme of judgment is the emphasis of the next section, **4:5-6:30**.

Mackay: The reality of divine anger awaiting the impenitent may not be dismissed as just an outmoded part of the Old Testament. All too often, like the people of Judah, we act as if it will never really take place, but the New Testament solemnly repeats these warnings (**Matt. 18:8; 25:41; Mark 9:43; 1 Cor. 3:13; Jude 7, 23**). And the reason for the judgment remains the same: "*the evil you have done*" (**26:3; 44:22**). It is not an arbitrary imposition of the Sovereign, but derives from the high honour he has bestowed upon mankind in that he treats us as responsible creatures. However, that honour is transformed into a nightmare if we do not exercise our God-given responsibility within the parameters that have been set out by our Creator.

The note of impending judgment which concludes the application of the object lesson of the two "sisters", Israel and Judah, leads directly into the presentation of that judgment in the following division, where details about how it will come upon Judah and Jerusalem are set out. In the form in which the prophecy was finally issued by Jeremiah this presentation addressed the exilic community at two levels: it enabled them to interpret their plight through realizing that the people had not responded to these impassioned pleas for repentance; and it gave them a measure of hope for the future by indicating that the way forwards was not through continuing rejection of the Lord, but rather by genuine contrition for their sin and by showing fidelity to their covenant lord/husband.

Peter Wallace: What Does True Repentance Look Like?

What does true repentance look like? How can we distinguish between true repentance and false repentance – the "pretense" of verse 10? In the moment when the words are spoken, we don't really know.

The only way to distinguish between returning with a "whole heart" and returning "in pretense" is by looking at the actions that come after the words. True repentance bears two sorts of fruits:

- the first is ethical – truth, justice, and righteousness (4:2);
- the second is missional – when God's people repent, the nations glory in the Lord (4:2).

Our Shorter Catechism says it well: "Repentance unto life is a saving grace whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it, unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." The Catechism captures very well the central point of Jeremiah 3: Repentance is a saving grace whereby a sinner turns from sin unto God.

Repentance is a turning. The word translated "return" is simply the Hebrew word "shub

– which means “to turn.” It is sometimes translated “turn” – sometimes “return” – and sometimes “repent.” A few weeks ago, we saw in the first Psalms of book 1 of the Psalter that this is a common word to use of how God must turn his face toward us, so that we can be saved. And when God turns his face toward us, then we can return to the LORD with a whole heart.

Introduction: “In the Days of King Josiah” (3:6a)

It’s important to note the “time stamp” on this prophecy: “in the days of King Josiah.” This means that this is early in Jeremiah’s ministry. King Josiah was the best king that Judah had. David, Solomon, and Hezekiah were all good, but 2 Kings 23:25 says that before Josiah there was no king in Jerusalem “who turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might.” Josiah was the most faithful king of Judah. So Jeremiah 3:6-4:4 is the message that the LORD had for Judah in the days when Judah had a great king. Having a good king – a reforming king – is not enough!

1. “She Did Not Return”: Judah Has Not Learned from the Adultery and Divorce of Her Sister, Israel (3:6b-10)

a. Adultery and the Divorce of Faithless Israel (v6b-8a)

The LORD starts by reflecting on the story of Israel – the northern kingdom. Israel had divided around the year 930 BC, with Jeroboam leading a rebellion against Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. For 200 years, the northern kingdom of Israel was the larger, more powerful, and more prosperous of the two. Even good kings of Judah, like Jehoshaphat, acknowledged that they were the junior partner in terms of power and influence. But quite frankly, to say that Israel was bigger than Judah is like saying that Connecticut is bigger than Rhode Island! Israel was bigger than Judah – but compared to the nations around her, Israel felt very small – and very alone.

And so Israel pursued alliances with the nations in order to protect her. And God calls this adultery – or more precisely, prostitution, since Israel “played the whore” in order to gain material advantage. In verses 6-8, God recounts the story of Israel. He thought that after Israel had played the whore with the nations and their gods, that she would return to him. But she did not return. Israel did not repent.

And so, ‘for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel’ God sent her away with a decree of divorce. God divorced Israel. Some people don’t like to say this. Some people prefer to say that God temporarily separated from Israel, but he didn’t really divorce her. God says that he sent her away with a decree of divorce. This is the word used in Deuteronomy 24:1-3, when it says that a man may send his wife away with a “bill of divorce.” It is only used four times in the OT – always with the same meaning. God divorced Israel by means of the Assyrian army of Sennacherib, which devastated the northern kingdom in the 720s and captured Samaria in 722, and took them away into exile. And over the next 800 years the northern tribes of Israel dwindled and mingled with the nations, until a mixed race known as the Samaritans was all that remained. And her treacherous sister, Judah, saw it. Israel is faithless. Judah is treacherous. There is a wordplay here that is hard to capture in translation.

The theme of the passage is turning/returning – in the sense of repentance. The word translated “faithless” is built off of that same word. So, perhaps “turncoat” would capture the wordplay. Turncoat Israel is famous for her turning! She turns this way and that way; she turns back and forth – but she never turns to me! And her treacherous sister, Judah, saw it.

[A brief note on gender: for most of the prophets, Israel and Judah are masculine; Samaria and Jerusalem – the capital cities – are feminine. Jeremiah consistently speaks of Israel and Judah in the feminine. Grammatically this is inappropriate in Hebrew. Nations are masculine. Cities are feminine. Jeremiah intentionally and obviously uses feminine pronouns for the masculine names, Israel and Judah. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that the head of a wife is her husband, the head of a man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God – thus establishing a parallel between a husband-wife relation (man and woman), and a Father-Son relation (God and Christ). The relationship of the Father and the Son is the paradigm for all human relationships. When God called Israel to be his son (Exodus 4) he also entered into a marriage relation with Israel. The theme of sonship highlights the ideas of image and likeness, as well as the idea of inheritance. The theme of marriage highlights the ideas of fidelity and love, as well as the idea of procreation. Jeremiah made this connection long before Paul – just glance ahead to verse 22 – “Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.” Are we talking about wives or sons? Exactly! Men are part of the bride. Women are part of the son.]

b. The Fake Repentance of Treacherous Judah (v8b-10)

We saw last time that Judah exchanged the glory of God for images – and the truth of God for a lie – “who say to a tree, ‘You are my father,’ and to a stone, ‘You gave me birth.’” (2:27) “Committing adultery with stone and tree” clearly identifies this as idolatry. In verse 6 it was “under” every green tree. Now it is “with” stone and tree. Creation itself is polluted by our idolatry. When you worship the creature instead of the Creator, you are defiling the creature as well as rebelling against the Creator. Judah saw what Israel did. Judah saw the results.

By the time Jeremiah is prophesying, it has been 100 years since Israel was divorced. Israel has been in exile in Assyria for over a century. The fall of Samaria was as long ago as World War I is to us. Remember the Ottoman Empire? What lessons have we learned from the fall of the Ottoman Empire? (Not much, from what I can see in the Middle East today!!) What effect did the fall of Samaria have on Jerusalem? How did Judah respond to the exile of Israel? She “did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense.” What is “fake repentance”? It’s the “sorry” given by the child who is required to “apologize to your sister!” It’s when you know that you need to say the words, but you fully intend to go back to your sin. Or, perhaps a better way of saying it is that you kind of wish that you really meant it – but in fact, you know that it’s not going to work! We saw this as one of the lies that Judah believed last time in chapter 2, verse 25: “It is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go.” Israel rebelled and stayed in rebellion – turning this way and that – but never turning back to the LORD. Judah rebelled and then repented – and then rebelled and then repented – but Judah did not return with her whole heart. Remember when Jeremiah is saying this:

“in the days of King Josiah” – in the days of the most faithful king Judah ever had! In the days of the great Reformer who restored the worship of God! In other words, even when you have the best king, the best worship – “your best life now!” – Judah is still half-hearted in their repentance. Jeremiah is identifying the fundamental problem with humanity – exemplified most clearly in the case study of Judah: even at our best, we are half-hearted in our repentance. We’re just faking it. Why do I know what fake repentance looks like? Because I do it all the time! I return to the Lord with part of my heart – and part of my heart says, “I don’t know how to stop...” Our problem is that we do not return to the Lord with a whole heart.

2. “Return, Faithless Israel”: the Call to True Repentance (3:11-13)

I appreciate the ESV being honest with the verb here. Some have gone the route of saying “less guilty” – but that is not God’s point. This is the verb that can be translated “to justify.” Faithless Israel – ever-turning Israel – has justified her soul more than treacherous Judah. But it is important to see the comparative here: Israel is more righteous than Judah. Israel is faithless, Judah is treacherous – “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!”

The prophet Ezekiel was a child in Jerusalem at this time. He may well have heard Jeremiah preach. He certainly knew the older prophet’s message well! Ezekiel will take the themes of Jeremiah 2-3 and ratchet up the rhetoric in Ezekiel 16, to the point that Jerusalem’s sin makes even Sodom and Gomorrah look righteous – a point that our Lord Jesus Christ will play off when he says that Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented if he had performed his mighty deeds before them! (Matt 11:20-24) But Ezekiel only began to prophesy in Babylon – after he was taken away with the first round of exiles in 597 BC. Jeremiah is preaching 25 years earlier – at the height of the reforms of the good king Josiah! And Jeremiah is saying that Josiah’s reforms are a sham. Judah’s repentance is a fraud. I want you to think about this carefully. The books of Kings and Chronicles portray Josiah’s reforms as being entirely sincere! But the book of Kings – in particular – makes it clear that Josiah’s repentance was way too late! And if you reflect on the fact that every good king tears down the high places, 12 Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, “Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever. Turn to me, O ever-turning, Israel! Shuva, meshuva Yisrael! I will not look on you in anger, for I am hasid – I am faithful – I am loyal – I am steadfast.

The phrase “declares the LORD” occurs eight times in our passage for tonight, reminding us that this is God’s message to us. And God’s message to us is that there is hope – even for faithless Israel – even for the people whom God divorced and sent away! And the reason for that hope is because God will not be angry forever. God is faithful. He is hasid – he is loyal to his covenant. His anger only exists because you are not hasid. You are not faithful. So how do we fix this? Verses 12-13 show us that repentance is a necessary condition for salvation. Repentance is not the reason why God will save us! But repentance is necessary for salvation. If you do not repent, you have no hope for salvation! Verses 12-13 also describe true repentance to us: Verse 12 has emphasized the importance of turning to God. Verse 13 highlights the importance of

“owning up” to our sin: 13 Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD. It’s so simple! All you have to do is turn to the LORD with all your heart, and acknowledge your guilt and admit your sins! It’s true.

Repentance is very simple. The first thing you have to do is admit that you were wrong. As our Shorter Catechism puts it, “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.” True repentance includes hatred for sin. When you apprehend the mercy of God in Christ, you begin to grieve over your sin – you hate what you once loved – because you see what your sin did to Jesus!

3. “Return, O Faithless Children” to a New Jerusalem (3:14-20)

a. The Presence of the LORD without the Ark (3:14-18)

Verses 14-18 are at the center of our text. You may have noticed the chiasm in the outline – the 1-2-3-2-1 format. Verse 14 is really important for understanding repentance: 14 Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; Perhaps better, “for I have mastered you” – or perhaps, “I rule over you.” There is some irony here. The word for “master” is the verbal form of the noun “baal” – the name of the Canaanite God. But the LORD is asserting his sovereign ownership of Israel.

The solution to our fake repentance is found not in any action that begins with us – but in what the LORD will do! I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. So long as God sits and waits for us to return, nothing is going to change. And so the LORD says in verse 15: ““And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. The shepherds of chapter 2 did not know the LORD. But God will give shepherds after his own heart – like David – who will teach and feed his people “with knowledge and understanding.” With knowledge and understanding... There are many who think that the human dilemma is a problem of knowledge. And so the solution, they say, is education. They are right! It is true that our problem is a problem of knowledge. It is true that the solution is education. But the educational reform that we need is not better Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math – or more classical schools with Latin and Greek – the knowledge that we need is to know God himself!

Verses 16-18 describe the glorious result of this knowledge as nothing less than a New Creation: 16 And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. 17 At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart. 18 In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage. Notice how Jeremiah says this: it’s not just that when God

makes things right for Judah and Israel that signals the restoration of the nations; rather, when God makes things right for Judah and Israel that constitutes the restoration of the nations!

Jeremiah is battling against how even the reform-minded era of Josiah “stubbornly follows their own evil heart” – and yet he sees that when Jerusalem is called the throne of the LORD, all nations will gather to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem! In Jeremiah’s day, the ark of the covenant of the LORD was the presence of the LORD. We know that God is with us in Jerusalem because we have the ark. But Jeremiah imagines a day when no one thinks about the ark – no one cares about the ark.

In Jeremiah’s day, Jerusalem is called “the throne of the LORD” because the ark of the covenant is his footstool. But Jeremiah imagines a day in which the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem will be so powerful that all nations will gather to it – even though there is no ark! It’s not just that treacherous Judah and faithless Israel will repent and return the LORD, “all nations... shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.”

For Jeremiah, if all you want is the repentance of Josiah – one king – that is pathetic! God’s promise is that all nations will be blessed through Abraham’s seed. You want reformation? True reformation – true repentance – comes when all nations no longer stubbornly follow their own evil heart. And only then will we see the true place of Israel:

b. The Inheritance of Sons, or a Treacherous Wife? (v19-20)

God reflects on his promises to Israel – “How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land.” Israel is my son, my firstborn... If Israel was the firstborn son – then the rest of the nations are also sons! (an implication that many Israelites had missed!) But I thought you would call me, ‘My Father’ – but instead you say to a tree, ‘You are my father!’ (2:27) Israel is an ungrateful son – and a treacherous wife who betrays her husband with another. What will Israel do? Jeremiah suggests a prayer of confession (in verses 21-25):

2’. “Return, O Faithless Sons”: A Voice of Confession (3:21-25)

Remember what I said about the word “faithless”? It’s actually built off of the word “to turn”? Return, O ever-turning sons, and I will heal your turnings! Not just “I will forgive” – but “I will heal.” God has forgiven them over and over again! But we need more than just forgiveness! If God just forgave your sins, but did not change your heart what good would that do? You and I would just be like Israel – turning back, over and over again, to our sin!

And so the people of God reply: “Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God. 23 Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies[b] on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. Our only hope is if the LORD our God comes to save us. Make haste, O God, to save us! Of course, God had said, back in verse 13, that we need to acknowledge our guilt and confess our sin.

So we acknowledge in verses 24-25: 24 “But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. 25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

Our idols cannot save us. We are covered in shame and dishonor. The prophets frequently refuse to name the name of “Baal” – choosing instead the name “Bosheth” – “shame.” Israel now acknowledges that “the shameful thing” (Baal – the Bosheth) has devoured all for which our fathers labored. When you trust in idols, your idols will devour your increase.

Deuteronomy warns against three idolatries – trusting in our own strength (militarism) – trusting in our own righteousness (moralism) – and trusting in our own wealth (materialism). You can see the same tendencies today. Americans tend to trust in our own strength to save us (and the rest of the world) – sometimes with catastrophic effects. Certainly American militarism is devouring all for which our fathers labored – flocks, herds, sons, daughters... Americans also tend to trust in our own righteousness – it's a funny sort of righteousness – since American moralism includes the celebration of adultery, abortion, and the oppression of the stranger. But that shouldn't surprise us – any time you trust your own righteousness, you are already perverting what righteousness is! And Americans tend to trust in our own wealth. American materialism is legendary! We look for mammon to save us – and so the economic collapse of 2008 devoured trillions of dollars. The shameful things that we trust are destroying us.

The first step in repentance is to come to God honestly and confess our sins – acknowledging our guilt and shame before him. We need to have a healthy sense of shame. We should be ashamed of ourselves. We have dishonored our heavenly Father – our glorious Husband!

1'. “If You Return, O Israel”: the Nations Will Glory in the LORD (4:1-4)

a. What Does True Repentance Look Like? (v1-2)

So, if you return, and if you remove your detestable things and swear ‘as the LORD lives’ in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then the nations will glory in the LORD!

Swearing “As the LORD lives” is not only a matter of worship – an oath is also for business transactions, legal matters, international politics. Jeremiah is describing a community characterized by truth, justice, and righteousness. Idolatry and injustice always go together. Repentance must entail a fundamental ethical change in us. We are no longer who we once were. But when the people of God live lives characterized by repentance – that results in the nations giving glory to God. So where do we start? Look at verses 3-4:

b. Circumcision of the Heart (v3-4)

Circumcision was the ritual that brought people into the covenant community. But God says that there is another circumcision that is necessary. “Repentance involves a radical

new beginning with God, with a fresh surrender of heart, mind, and will, of worship and life, to him as covenant Lord.... Without it, there could be nothing ahead but judgment..." (Wright, 90)

The law has established that Judah has no "right" of return. The LORD has no obligation to take back his adulterous people. The law has no answer for the sin and rebellion of Israel. How do I circumcise my heart? The only way that I can avoid the wrath of God is if I circumcise my heart.

Deuteronomy 30 spoke of the coming Exile: "And when you all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you.... And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." (30:1-6)

Jeremiah's call to repentance peters out in 4:4 because Judah is unable and unwilling to circumcise their hearts. They are too attached to their idols. They will not repent and return to the LORD. And so for 600 years, Judah remains under the threat of God's wrath. They are only in exile in Babylon for 70 years – but after the restoration, the kingdom is not re-established. The nations do not glory in the Lord! That will only happen when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. If my salvation depends on my repentance, then I don't like my chances! But salvation belongs to the Lord – and when God circumcises your heart, as he did on the cross of Jesus! – you are set free from the wrath and curse of God!

TEXT: Jeremiah 4:5-31

TITLE: THINGS ARE WORSE THAN YOU IMAGINE

BIG IDEA:

REPENT FROM SIN BEFORE GOD'S JUDGMENT DEVASTATES YOU

INTRODUCTION:

It is so easy for people to have a false sense of security. If you don't really understand the character of God and you don't really understand your own depravity, you fail to see the danger of God's imminent judgment. You can confuse external religious rites with the type of inward righteousness that God demands. You can brush aside God's warnings about accountability and coming judgment by mocking the promise of Christ's return.

The people of Israel with their long history of idolatry and rebellion needed to be shocked out of their complacency and challenged to repent before it will be too late. We cannot trifle with sin. We cannot presume against God's goodness and His patience and His forbearance. Judgment is coming. We need cleansing while there is still time to turn to God.

REPENT FROM SIN BEFORE GOD'S JUDGMENT DEVASTATES YOU

I. (:5-13) LOOK OUT -- TWO DECLARATIONS OF COMING JUDGMENT

God Speaks to Jeremiah and Jeremiah Responds

A. (:5-10) First Declaration of Judgment – Take Cover – Judgment is Coming

1. (:5-9) God Speaks to Jeremiah: Devastating Judgment Announced
 - a. (:5-6) **Lookout's Declaration:** Seek Refuge from Coming Destruction
“Declare in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem, and say, ‘Blow the trumpet in the land; Cry aloud and say, ‘Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities.’ Lift up a standard toward Zion! Seek refuge, do not stand still, For I am bringing evil from the north, And great destruction.”

Similar to air raid siren coupled with the raising of a visual signal (the flag)

Mackay: The trumpet was an instrument made of horn, which was not intended for musical performance (it emitted a raucous blare) but to give a signal. It was used in time of invasion or emergency to alert the populace throughout the land to imminent problem (**Amos 36; Joel 2:1**). There follows a series of imperatives, reflecting the breathless urgency of the situation.

Evil from the north = Babylon

- b. (:7) **Lion Destroying**
“A lion has gone up from his thicket, And a destroyer of nations has set

out; He has gone out from his place To make your land a waste. Your cities will be ruins without inhabitant.”

Mackay: The conventional policy of seeking refuge in the cities will prove ineffective in this case, because rather than providing protection, the cities themselves will fall before the enemy and no one will be left alive in them.

c. (:8) **Lamenting Divine Anger**

“For this, put on sackcloth, Lament and wail; For the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.”

d. (:9) **Leadership Dismayed**

“‘And it shall come about in that day,’ declares the LORD, ‘that the heart of the king and the heart of the princes will fail; and the priests will be appalled, and the prophets will be astounded.’”

Longman: The leaders ... have been smug in their self-confidence. As Jeremiah will repeatedly point out, these leaders of the people above all others resist Jeremiah’s message that judgment is coming because of the people’s guilt. Therefore when destruction does arrive they will be the first to **lose heart, be horrified, and be appalled**. It will take them by utter surprise.

2. (:10) Jeremiah Responds: False Security Mocked – Lack of Discernment

“Then I said, ‘Ah, Lord God! Surely Thou hast utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, ‘You will have peace’; whereas a sword touches the throat.’”

Complete lack of spiritual discernment; unaware of their perilous condition

Mackay: quoting **Calvin** – who supposed that the speech was ironic, bitterly taunting and deriding those who had falsely prophesied in the Lord’s name ... The message the false prophets propagated with the approval of the religious and state authorities was a distortion of this because it defined peace as the continuation of the political status quo without any acknowledgment of the covenantal dimensions of peace.

Utley: This false message of hope and deliverance from invasion was what the false prophets were preaching in God's name (cf. **Jer. 6:14; 8:11; 14:13; 23:16-17; 28:1ff**). God let this occur but the speaker and hearer are responsible!

B. (:11-13) Second Declaration of Judgment – Overwhelming Devastation

1. (:11-13a) God Speaks to Jeremiah: Powerful Forces Unleashed

“In that time it will be said to this people and to Jerusalem, ‘A scorching wind from the bare heights in the wilderness in the direction of the daughter of My people-- not to winnow, and not to cleanse, a wind too strong for this-- will come at My command; now I will also pronounce judgments against them. Behold, he goes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles.’”

Calvin: “*pronounce judgments*” -- God briefly intimates, that he had hitherto exercised great forbearance towards the Jews; but that as he found that his indulgence availed nothing, except that they became more and more ferocious, he declares, that he would now become their judge to punish their wickedness. . .

As to the clouds, the whirlwind, and the eagles, (for the import of the three similitudes is the same,) the Prophet no doubt intended thus to set forth the quickness of God’s vengeance; but yet there is some difference. We see how clouds suddenly arise and spread over the whole heaven; and thus it happens when a whirlwind is in the air. Hence when he compares God’s chariots to clouds and the whirlwind, it is the same as if he had said, that the beginning of the calamity would be sudden, because God would unexpectedly arise, after having been apparently asleep for a long time. But when he says, that God’s horses would be swifter than eagles, he means, that it would be easy for God, when once he had begun, to destroy the whole of Judea, as it were in a moment, or at least in a very short time; for we know how swift is the flying of the eagle; but he says, that the horses of God would be swifter than the eagles.

Constable: They were all too familiar with such devastating winds, or siroccos, that blew almost unbearable heat and dust into Judah from the Arabian Desert (cf. **Genesis 41:6; Jonah 4:8**).

2. (:13b) Jeremiah Responds (identifying with Judah): No Hope of Deliverance
“*Woe to us, for we are ruined!*”

Mackay: Though Jeremiah is prepared to identify with the people, he can also stand over against them and perceive their failings.

II. (:14-18) LOOK WITHIN – YOUR SINS NEED CLEANSING

A. (:14-15) Repent – Nation Needs Cleansing

“Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved. How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you? For a voice declares from Dan, and proclaims wickedness from Mount Ephraim.”

It is never too late to deal with sin – as long as you have life and breath, turn to God and seek cleansing

Utley: an allusion to washing a soiled garment, which is a metaphor for repentance and cleansing (cf. **Ps. 51:2,7; Isa. 1:16**). It is a call, like **Ezekiel 18**, for an individual to turn back to YHWH and change his ways (cf. **Jer. 4:3-4**).

Spurgeon: Spurgeon preached a wonderful sermon on this text, titled **Bad Lodgers, and How to Treat Them**. He explained how evil thoughts were like bad renters or lodgers in a property. “*Now, the Lord says, ‘How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?’* for they are all vain-these delays, these false promises, these self-

deceptions. How long shall it be that they shall throng the avenues of your soul and curse your spirit?"

- Why evil thoughts are like bad lodgers:
 - o Vain thoughts are bad lodgers because they are deceitful.
 - o Vain thoughts are bad lodgers because they pay no rent; they bring in nothing good.
 - o Vain thoughts are bad lodgers because they waste your goods and destroy your property.
 - o Vain thoughts are bad lodgers because worse than damaging your house, they damage you.
 - o Vain thoughts are bad lodgers because they bring you under condemnation.

- What one should do with these bad lodgers:
 - o Give them the eviction notice at once.
 - o If they refuse to leave, then starve them out.
 - o Sell the house out from under them; put the house under new ownership.

B. (:16-17) Report – Judgment is a Result of Rebellion

“Report it to the nations, now! Proclaim over Jerusalem, 'Besiegers come from a far country, and lift their voices against the cities of Judah. Like watchmen of a field they are against her round about, because she has rebelled against Me,' declares the LORD.”

Byron Chesney: The Hebrews constructed tents around their fields and keepers would stay in them to guard the field and to be there in case anything went wrong. Jeremiah is comparing the invaders from the north to these keepers. They will surround Jerusalem like the keepers surround the fields.

C. (:18) Reconsider – You are to Blame

“Your ways and your deeds have brought these things to you. This is your evil. How bitter! How it has touched your heart!”

Calvin: For hypocrites are wont in their lamentations to cast the blame on God, or at least to complain of fortune. The Prophet anticipates these evasions, by shewing that however bitter might be what the Jews had to endure, and that though God should pierce them through and penetrate to their very bowels and hearts, yet they themselves were the authors of all their calamities.

III. (:19-26) LOOK AROUND – IMAGES OF DEVASTATION AND DISSOLUTION ABOUND

A. (:19-21) Despair / Panic – The Whole Land is Devastated

“My soul, my soul! I am in anguish! Oh, my heart! My heart is pounding in me; I cannot be silent, because you have heard, O my soul, The sound of the

trumpet, The alarm of war. Disaster on disaster is proclaimed, for the whole land is devastated; Suddenly my tents are devastated, My curtains in an instant. How long must I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?"

Tents and curtains are images used to convey how vulnerable Judah was – as opposed to fortified cities that could withstand any attack

B. (:22) Depravity – What Does God Say About Us?

1. Foolish

"For My people are foolish, they know Me not;"

Mackay: After the emotional intensity and confused upheaval of the previous verses, Jeremiah inserts an oracle in which the lord speaks in measured and cool tones reminiscent of the language of the wisdom teachers as found in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. The switch may well have been designed to shock the people into an appropriate response.

2. Ignorant

"They are stupid children, and they have no understanding."

Mackay: They lack discernment to appreciate what information is relevant and to understand its implications so as to form appropriate decisions as the basis for their action.

3. Wicked

"They are shrewd to do evil, but to do good they do not know."

Constable: The Lord complained that His people were foolish, like stupid children. They did not really understand Him, but felt they could deceive Him, and that He would not bring them to account for their sins. They were clever when it came to sinning, but not clever at all when it came to understanding that He would punish their sins

C. (:23-26) Dissolution -- Status of World Reverts to Pre-Creation Emptiness

When I looked around, what did I see?

Four separate pictures ("I looked") of the resulting desolation"

1. (:23) Unformed

"I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light."

2. (:24) Unstable

"I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro."

3. (:25) Uninhabited

"I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled."

4. (:26) Undeveloped

“I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were pulled down Before the LORD, before His fierce anger.”

Mackay: What has been revealed to him is a picture of the dissolution of the cosmos as a sign of how dire the impending desolation of Judah was to be and also as a sign of how structurally significant the divine action was. There was no incongruity or exaggeration involved: dissolving, however temporarily, the covenant bond between the Lord and Israel was a step of the same magnitude as undoing the divine creative purpose for the earth and reverting to pre-creation chaos.

Ryken: If these verses sound familiar, it is because Jeremiah deliberately repeats the vocabulary of **Genesis 1**. The destruction of Judah will be so catastrophic that it will be like the un-creation of creation. When God created the world he brought order out of chaos, light out of darkness, and fullness out of emptiness. Now the judgment of God is bringing chaos out of order, darkness out of light, and emptiness out of fullness.

Feinberg: Commentators have been unstinting in praise of this beautiful vignette, and rightly so. It has been acclaimed one of the most forceful passages in all prophetic literature. For vividness, simplicity, directness, breadth of reference, and gravity of subject matter, the verses are unique in Scripture.

IV. (:27-31) LOOK HONESTLY – DON’T KID YOURSELF

A. (:27-28) Sovereign Purpose

1. (:27) Remnant – Sovereign Purpose demonstrated in not utterly destroying
“For thus says the LORD, ‘The whole land shall be a desolation, Yet I will not execute a complete destruction.’”

Parunak: The persistent promise of a remnant throughout the judgments announced by the prophets. He can make this promise because the judgment is under his control.

2. (:28) Resolute – Sovereign Purpose demonstrated in not relenting
“For this the earth shall mourn, And the heavens above be dark, Because I have spoken, I have purposed, And I will not change My mind, nor will I turn from it.”

B. (:29-31) Ultimate Despair

1. (:29) No Refuge
“At the sound of the horseman and bowman every city flees; They go into the thickets and climb among the rocks; Every city is forsaken, And no man dwells in them.”

Mackay: (:29-31) – The closing verses of the chapter describe what will happen when

the enemy army arrives. The inhabitants of the towns of Judah will flee in panic, and Jerusalem will not be exempt either. None of the political wiles that had worked before will be able to deflect the enemy from wreaking the havoc he has planned, and the city is depicted in her death throes.

Longman: reaction of the inhabitants of the attacked towns. They flee the inhabited areas and, as was typical in such situations, seek hiding places in the rough terrain in the nearby countryside. **Rocks** likely refers to nearby cliffs and *wadi walls*, which had crevices and caves that provided suitable hiding places.

2. (:30) No Rescuer

“And you, O desolate one, what will you do?

- *Although you dress in scarlet,*
- *Although you decorate yourself with ornaments of gold,*
- *Although you enlarge your eyes with paint,*

In vain you make yourself beautiful; Your lovers despise you; They seek your life.”

Mackay: Are there overtones of Jezebel here (**2 Kgs. 9:30-33**)? The people will do anything rather than turn to the Lord.

Constable: The Lord asked Judah what she would do then. Presently she pursued selfish interests and tried to make herself as attractive as possible, like a harlot, but the nations that pretended to love her would turn against her and attack her (cf. **2 Kings 9:30; Revelation 17**). No last-minute compromise with the invaders would placate them. The unfaithful wife of Yahweh would reap judgment for the profligacy she had sown (cf. **Jeremiah 3:1; Jeremiah 2:35-36**).

Ryken: Even after all her primping, Judah will be destroyed. . . To put it another way, Judah had a fatal attraction. Jeremiah warned God’s people again and again that false gods abuse their worshippers. This northern army has not come for love, but for violence. Judah’s fancy dress and shiny beads cannot save her. She will die, it seems, in childbirth.

3. (:31) No Relief

“For I heard a cry as of a woman in labor, The anguish as of one giving birth to her first child, The cry of the daughter of Zion gasping for breath, Stretching out her hands, saying, “Ah, woe is me, for I faint before murderers.”

CONCLUSION:

Illustration: I like the honesty of my five year old grandson – when discussing salvation and what it means to own Jesus as the Lord of one’s life . . . he honestly professes: “I will believe in Jesus the day that He comes back.” When his Dad patiently explains that it will be too late to repent at that time; he quickly reconsiders his options and

comes up with a true reflection of the natural rebellious heart of man: “Then I will turn to Jesus the day before.” Sorry, it doesn’t work that way.

Now is the time to repent. Today is the day of salvation and the cleansing of your heart. You must deal with sin before it is too late and God’s judgment sweeps over with devastating effects.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we been surprised to experience the discipline of the Lord? How did we respond?
- 2) What wicked thoughts do we give lodging to when we should be quick to evict and take every thought captive?
- 3) How can you see from this passage that Jeremiah got the reputation as the “weeping prophet”?
- 4) Why does God combine images of horror and destruction and woe with glimmers of hope and a remnant and future restoration?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mackay: One feature that is recurrent throughout this division is “*the foe from the north*” (4:5-9, 13-17, 19-21, 29-31; 5:15-17; 6:1-8, 22-26). The threat from the north had originally been revealed to Jeremiah at the start of his ministry in connection with the vision of the boiling pot (1:13-16). In his description of the enemy Jeremiah identifies them as coming from the north (4:6; 6:1, 22) and from a distant land (4:16; 5:15; 6:22), being an ancient nation (5:15), speaking a foreign language (5:15), being merciless (6:23), taking captives, having armies consisting of great warriors and armed with bows and spears (4:29; 6:23), riding on swift horses and chariots (4:13), attacking unexpectedly (4:20; 6:26), using battle formations (6:23), and being bold enough to attack a fortified city at noon (6:4-5). . . The most plausible argument for detecting an apocalyptic element in what Jeremiah says is the picture of cosmic dissolution in 4:23-26. But every judgment of the Lord in the flow of human history is a precursor of the final Day of the Lord, and for Jeremiah that ultimate background does not dominate, though it may colour (cf. 4:9), the immediate catastrophe facing the nation. There seems little doubt that Jeremiah anticipated the attacks of an historical enemy to come from the north.

Parunak: Many religions have two gods or sets of gods: one good (to bring happiness), and another evil (bringing sadness), and the two are always fighting, because each is

sovereign only in its own domain, and neither can overcome the other. While there are both good and evil spirits, the Bible is clear that God is sovereign both in happiness and in suffering. No one can block the blessings that he offers; but no one can deflect the judgments that he brings. This is a double motive for trusting in him alone.

Andrew Webb: Our culture is disintegrating, and we are increasingly desperate for solutions, as long as the solutions don't include God. I call this the "**Anything But God**" or ABG syndrome. And you see it all over the place, for instance scientists now know that evolution simply cannot account for the incredible complexity of cells, it cannot explain where all the information contained within the DNA Helix came from and yet they are more willing to theorize the aliens from other planets might have introduced cells into the primordial oceans than that God created life. Any explanation, I mean any explanation is preferable to "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." . . .

Viewed objectively, it's utterly crazy – given the choice between an All Good, All Wise, and All powerful Creator and heaps of worthless idols that cannot help us, and which frequently destroy us, our natural inclination is to choose the idols every single time.

That is unfortunately what the nation of Judah had been doing for hundreds of years, and that in spite of God relentlessly pursuing them like the hound of heaven, sending them prophet after prophet to plead with them to turn aside, warning them what would happen if they didn't cease their endless rebellion and spiritual adultery. . .

Judah ignored those warnings because they didn't fit with their desires, their view of the way things should be, but the warnings of prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah were in perfect keeping with what Moses had already told them would happen if they pursued false gods. . .

What made Judah's suffering most terrible was the fact that it did not bring them to repent and flee to Christ. They continued on in their futile rebellion until they had drunk down the cup of wrath to the bottom.

Frank Wang: The judgment that we expect is depressing. We expect it to be really terrible in light of just how bad the people are. But the reactions and perspectives of the major characters reveal that each one approaches the coming judgment differently. The people react with fear, panic, and continue in their own strength. The Lord acts with finality and wrath, executing justice for the many sins committed against Him. He is fed up with a sinful, unfaithful people, and so He's taking extreme measures to discipline them. But Jeremiah is stuck in the middle. He's one of the people of God, but he's also the Prophet of God. He understands that the disaster to come is richly deserved, but that disaster is coming for him. How does he react?

Timothy Dane: Dealing With Sin before It's Too Late

Our greatest need is deliverance from sin; Involves past, present and future aspects;

Justification – from the penalty of sin, Sanctification – from the power of sin,
Glorification – from the presence of sin;
You must believe what God says about Sin and about its remedy;
Regard the patience of the Lord to be our salvation – unbelievers mock the promise of
Christ’s return;
Understand God has granted us time for repentance, but we need to deal with our sin
before it is too late; you don’t know if you will have a tomorrow;
Today’s sin may bring an irreversible judgment;

(:5-18) 6 Urgent reasons they must deal with sin right now and Repent

- A. (:5-7) God is Bringing a Great Judgment
A red alert; attack is coming; flee to a place where there may be safety; not much
you can do when a wicked nation attacks;
Engage their warning system – blow the trumpet for those close; lift the banner for
those farther away; solution is really repentance
- B. (:6b-7) Evil is Already on the Way – Coming from the North (Babylon)
God uses nations as His instruments to execute His wrath; referencing Babylon;
Is. 41:25; Is. 39:5
Lion prominent in ancient Babylonian thinking; will happen 10-15 years down the
road from time of this writing
You will be destroyed, killed or taken off into captivity
- C. (:8-9) God’s Wrath is not Turning Away
Demonstrate genuine repentance; long history of sin and unbelief;
4 explanations of why they need to deal with their sins
- D. (:10) You Have a Total Loss of Spiritual Discernment
No spiritual sensitivity
God is not the one causing evil; but in His sovereignty He permitted these false
prophets to come on the scene; Jeremiah not blaming God; God is not the
Immediate Cause
- E. (:11-14) When the Storm Blows In It Will Leave Nothing in its Wake
Describes overwhelming scourge; huge dust cloud
When Babylon comes, nothing will be left
Application: (:14) – Wash your hearts – seems like it is too late and God’s mind is
made up; yet there is still an appeal for repentance; it is never too late to deal with
sin as long as you have a breath
- F. (:15-18) When Judgment Comes It Will Be Intense and Will Not Let Up Until
There is Total Destruction

Peter Wallace: The Undoing of Creation – Disaster from the North

Chapter 3, verse 6, says that this message came to Jeremiah in the days of Josiah. We
saw in chapter 1 that the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of
Josiah (ca. 627 B.C.).

Jeremiah 1-6 presents itself as the basic message of the prophet Jeremiah. This is the
word of the LORD that Jeremiah proclaimed in the 620s and 610s – in the years of
Josiah’s reforms – in the years when everything was glorious! It must have seemed odd

to King Josiah – the best king in the history of Jerusalem – to have this message proclaimed in the midst of reformation and renewal. Disaster is coming from the north! After all, the Assyrian empire was crumbling. Babylon had revolted, and so the powers of the age were enmeshed in civil war and internal crises. Jerusalem was free from external constraint. It was a good time to be a reforming king!

But then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: it's too late. Judgment is coming. Jeremiah 2-6 summarizes the basic message of the prophet. In chapter 2, the LORD accuses Jerusalem of infidelity and betrayal. In chapter 3, the LORD says that the northern kingdom of Israel is better than Judah, and calls faithless Israel and faithless Judah to repent and return.

In chapters 4-6, the LORD declares the coming disaster from the north that is decreed for Jerusalem because they refused to repent and return. Josiah might have said, “But we have repented! Look at all my reforms in worship!” But Jeremiah’s message is that your repentance is half-hearted! Your repentance isn’t good enough! The outward reformation of worship cannot save Jerusalem. Your heart must change: As we saw last time – “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts” (4:4) 2 or as he says in 4:14 – “wash your heart from evil, that you may be saved”! Well, as Jon and I have pointed out from Matthew 3 – that’s why Jesus came! That’s why Jesus was baptized. It was necessary to fulfill all righteousness.

Israel’s repentance was never enough. Israel’s repentance never lasted. We needed someone whose repentance would endure until the end of the world! And that’s why when the LORD turned his face toward us, and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, only then was there a repentance – a turning away from sin to God – that would endure forever! And that’s why Jeremiah 4 is so important for us. Jeremiah 4 is what happens when there is **insufficient repentance**! And Jeremiah 4 ends with the undoing of Creation. Sin brings death – and death is the undoing of Creation – a return to the primordial chaos before God ordered the world.

1. The Announcement of Coming Judgment: Disaster from the North (v5-18)

a. “Blow the Trumpet”: a Destroyer of Nations Is Coming (v5-8)

In verses 5-8 we hear the blast of the trumpet. The trumpet blast will be used several times in chapter 4 and in chapter 6 to signal the coming judgment. In verses 19 and 21 the prophet (or the LORD himself) will be in anguish over this trumpet blast. The shophar – the ram’s horn – is designed for sending loud signals across the land. When the people in the villages and fields hear the shophar they know that they must assemble quickly. Jeremiah does not say whose army is coming. He simply says that disaster comes from the north. (as usual!) We can probably assume that this is the Babylonians – but the identity of the army does not matter. After all, notice how Jeremiah says it: “I bring disaster from the north.”

Hosea 5 and Amos 1-3 both spoke of blowing trumpets, disaster coming – and a lion roaring and destroying his prey. Hosea and Amos were both quite clear that the lion was Yahweh himself. The agent may be the nations – but the lion is the LORD! The anger

of the LORD is against Jerusalem. Who can stand?

Listen to verse 8, “For this put on sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned back from us.” There’s our word “turn” again! Until the anger of the LORD turns back, until the LORD turns his face toward us and shines upon us – we are doomed! What do you until then? “Put on sackcloth, lament and wail.” I want you to think about this. Jeremiah is not talking about the ordinary individual struggles we all face. Jeremiah is talking about times of corporate, communal judgment – times when the whole people of God are suffering. What can you do when Judah is overrun? No, that’s what Peter thought when Jesus was arrested... But Peter didn’t understand what Jeremiah had said – much less what Jesus had said... What can you do when the enemies of God are seeking to destroy the people of God? Put on sackcloth, lament, and wail.

Verse 9 reminds us of Jeremiah’s focus on the leadership of Jerusalem:

b. In that Day – Courage Shall Fail Kings, Priests, and Prophets (v9)

The kings and priests of Jerusalem will be shocked. The palace and the temple had interpreted God’s promises to David to mean that Jerusalem would never fall. The presence of the LORD in the temple guaranteed that no enemy could defeat them. (Twenty years later, the prophet Ezekiel would see a vision of the LORD departing from the temple – chased out by his rebellious people!) So it was true. So long as the LORD remained in the midst of his people, no enemy could destroy them.

And so Jeremiah voices the question that the kings, priests and prophets are asking:

Interlude: Jeremiah’s Query – Has God’s Promise of Peace Deceived Jerusalem? (v10)

The prophets had declared ‘shalom’ on Jerusalem. For generations the prophets have been saying that it shall be well – that Jerusalem would have peace. And not just the false prophets! Many of the Psalms speak of God’s faithfulness to his covenant. The Psalms would have been sung in the temple – as Israel would be reminded that God’s covenant with David will endure forever! The people of God sincerely believed that God had promised shalom – peace – to Jerusalem. And he had! And so Jeremiah says that the Lord GOD has utterly deceived this people and Jerusalem. There may be a touch of sarcasm here. But it is not the biting sarcasm of the mocker.

After all, in 1 Kings 22 the prophet Micaiah speaks of how the LORD sent a lying spirit into the prophets of Israel in order to deceive King Ahab. I want you to think about that. Sometimes God deceives his people. When false prophets come and preach lies to the people of God it is because God sent them to preach lies! Why does God deceive his people? There is no one more easily deceived than a person who wants to be deceived. If you want to do something – I mean if you really want to do it – but you know that God says that you shouldn’t – and then you ask God for a sign – “I know you don’t normally want people to do this, Lord, but if you want me to do this, could you please give me a sign...” God may very well send you precisely that sign in order to ascertain

whether you will obey him – or whether you will chase after your self-deception. And so Jeremiah answers his own question. Yes, God has deceived Jerusalem – because Jerusalem wanted to be deceived. They wanted to believe that Jerusalem was secure – they wanted to believe that they would have peace on their own terms. And so,

b'. At That Time – a Wind of Judgment from the Desert (v11-12)

Please let that sink in! A hot wind from the bare heights in the desert toward the daughter of my people, not to winnow or cleanse! The east wind in Israel is the wind of judgment. The east wind is a hot wind off the desert. The east wind never brings rain – never brings blessing. The east wind – the hot wind off the desert – comes bringing judgment. But until today, the hot wind off the desert had come in in order to winnow or cleanse the people of God. But now the hot wind from the desert is blowing – a wind too full for this comes for me! Now it is I who speak in judgment upon them.

Of course, the word for wind is ruach (also translated “spirit”). When Jesus comes, John says that Jesus will baptize with the Spirit and with fire. Spirit and fire baptism is precisely what Jesus must undergo – and Spirit and fire baptism is precisely what Jeremiah says that Jerusalem must undergo.

a'. “Behold, He Comes – Woe to Us, for We Are Ruined” (v13)

And verse 13 concludes the first section of the chapter with a reflection on the coming of the one who comes in judgment. Woe to us – for we are ruined. When God comes in judgment, we are ruined. And that’s why Jeremiah interjects in verse 14:

Interlude 2: A Plea for Repentance (v14)

Wind and fire are coming (verses 4 and 12), but there is a washing that can save you! Wash your heart from evil – that you may be saved. Baptism saves – not just the external washing of the body (Jerusalem thought that the external reforms of Josiah could save them!) but only the washing of the heart.

The word “evil” is the same word translated “disaster” in verse 6. God brings evil/disaster from the north. So wash your heart from evil/disaster. In one sense, our English translations do the right thing. The Hebrew word ra’a means more than just “evil” – it includes the idea of “disaster.” But there is also to drawback to the different translations. Because Jeremiah’s point is that the same thing that is coming from the north – the disaster – the evil – the destruction from the north – is also in our hearts. Yes, the wicked are coming against Jerusalem. But why is that? It is because of the wicked thoughts that lodge within you. Disaster comes because disastrous thoughts take root within your heart.

I don’t think that I need to comment on verses 15-18 – they simply explain the reason in very straightforward terms:

a”. ‘He Is Coming’ – But Your Ways Have Brought This Doom upon You (v15-18)

There are four “kiy’s” in our passage – the Hebrew word “kiy” is translated “for” or

“because” – and usually gives the reason for what is happening! Four times – in verse 15, in verse 22, in verse 27, and in verse 31 – the word ‘kiy’ begins a sentence. Each time explaining the reason for the judgment that is coming. Here in verses 15-18, we see that when evil dwells in the heart of the people of God, then evil comes upon the people of God. Our disastrous hearts are the root of the disaster that destroys us!

2. How Should We Think about the Coming Judgment: The Prophet and His God (v19-31)

So how should we think about this coming judgment? There is, perhaps, a tendency for some to respond by saying, 8 “Ah, they deserved it!” Bad things happened to them because they sinned! They had evil hearts, and so evil came them. That is certainly not the way that Jeremiah responds. It is certainly not the way that God teaches us to think! Listen to the words of Jeremiah – the word of the LORD!

a. The Knowledge of Good and Evil (v19-22)

i) Anguish and Agony: I Hear and I See the Coming Judgment (v19-21)

Who is writhing? Who is in anguish? In verses 16-18 the “I” is Yahweh who announces the coming judgment. Is Yahweh still speaking in verses 19-21? Or is it Jeremiah? Certainly in verse 22 it is Yahweh speaking: “My people are foolish; they know me not.” But the “I” of verses 23-26 probably is Jeremiah – as it speaks of how the cities were laid in ruins “before the LORD.” This is why we opened the series on Jeremiah by focusing on the relationship between “the words of Jeremiah” and “the word of the LORD.” (Jeremiah 1:1-2)

More than any other prophet, Jeremiah uses first person address to blur the distinction between the prophet and the LORD. Jeremiah writhes in pain as he hears the sound of the trumpet. It hasn’t happened yet. We are still 20 years away from the Babylonian invasion – but as Jeremiah hears the sound the trumpet his heart beats wildly, because he knows what will surely come to pass.

How long must I see the standard and hear the sound of the trumpet? In saying this, Jeremiah inhabits the standpoint of Yahweh. Our Confession says that God does not have a “body, parts, or passions” (2.1). People sometimes think that scripture contradicts this. Plainly scripture teaches that God loves, grieves, rejoices, and more! But when the church has taught that God does not have passions – that God is impassible – we do not mean that God does not love, grieve, rejoice, etc. You will better understand divine impassibility when you think about the closely related word “passive.” The one who is passionate is being acted upon by external forces. Why are you angry? “Because of what he said!”

Our God is not like the Greek or Roman gods. The Greek and Roman gods were subject to all sorts of passions – their mood swings were truly epic! If God has passions, then you would need some way of divining his mood before you would dare approach him in prayer! (This is what pagan priests did on a regular basis – consulting oracles, reading the stars, omens, etc.) One of the greatest and most comforting things about our God is

that you don't have to worry about what kind of mood he is in today! And so we can speak of "the Passion of the Impassible God," because Jeremiah understood that God's impassibility does not mean that God is aloof and indifferent. If it seems strange to say "the passion of the impassible God," think about the parallel – "the body of the bodiless God." Scripture everywhere talks about the "right hand" of the LORD – the eyes of the LORD watch over his word, and his ears are open to the cry of his people. The mouth of the LORD has spoken – and his face is turned toward us. That's a lot of body parts for a God who has no body or parts! We are created in the image of God. God gave us eyes so that we could see – but our eyes only see some things. God's eyes see everything. The physical eye was designed as a dim copy of the true eye. Because God sees all things with his uncreated eye, therefore we see some things truly with our created eyes. Our bodies were designed to reflect all sorts of things about God – we are finite pictures of the infinite. In the same way, the passions are the created and (since the Fall) the corrupted picture of God's affections. Our love, hope, anger, jealousy – and every other emotion – are dim and now twisted reflections of the true passion of God. God has no physical body – and he has no emotional passions – but just as our bodies reflect something fundamentally true about God, so also our passions reflect something about him as well. Our text tonight helps illustrate this.

God is angry with his people. He is jealous of their dalliances with other gods. How would you respond if your wife was sleeping around with other men? You would be angry and jealous! But God's anger is not "like" ours – in the same way that God's ears are not "like" our ears! Rather, our ears are like God's ears – his ears that hear all things before they are spoken! And our anger is only like God's anger – his holy anger that always does justice and loves mercy! In the same way that my right arm is a pitiful and pathetic picture of God's power – so also my anger is a pitiful and pathetic picture of God's anger! Verse 22 explains why all this is happening – and clearly takes on the voice of the LORD:

ii) "For My People Are Foolish; They Know Me Not" (v22)

Our second 'kiy' is found in verse 22. In verse 18 we heard that it was our ways and deeds that led to this doom – this evil. Now we hear that it was our foolishness – our lack of understanding. They know how to do evil – but not how to do good. Adam and Eve ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Unfortunately, their descendants only know how to do evil. They are stupid children! If you would know how to do good, it is not enough to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil! If you would know how to do good, then you must know God himself. Clearly the image of creation and fall is in Jeremiah's mind. After all, in verse 23, he speaks of how the earth has returned to "tohu vbohu" – the phrase used in Genesis 1 to speak of how the earth was barren and empty – before God said "Let there be light." The sin of Jerusalem has returned the world to darkness. And the judgment of Jerusalem will be the end of the world!

b. The Judgment of Jerusalem as the End of the World (v23-28)

i) Tohu vBohu: I Looked at the Unmaking of Creation (v23-26)

Four times the prophet says “I looked” – the same word that God used in Genesis 1 – “and the LORD saw that it was good...” Is this Jeremiah looking? Or is it the LORD – looking out upon the earth – the earth that he brought out of tohu vbohu! – now returned to barrenness and emptiness; the heavens where he made the great lights – now returned to darkness; the mountains and hills that he established to remain secure forever! – now quaking and shaking to and fro; the man and the creatures who were to be fruitful and multiply! – now there is no man; the fruitful land which was to bring forth plenty! – now a desert and all its cities laid in ruins. Why? Because the LORD himself has come in fierce anger to destroy his own creation!

ii) For Thus Says the LORD: My Purposes Will Stand (v27-28)

And so in verse 27 we hear our third ‘kiy’ – 27 For thus says the LORD, “The whole land shall be a desolation; yet I will not make a full end. Here there is a faint ray of hope! The whole land (same word as in verse 28 – so it could mean “all the earth”) will be a desolation – but God promises that he will not make a full end. I will return the earth to primordial chaos – but not entirely! 28 “For this the earth shall mourn, and the heavens above be dark; for I have spoken; I have purposed; I have not relented, nor will I turn back.”

At the cross of Jesus we see where this leads. The passion of the impassible God will lead him to the incarnation. After all, he looked, “and behold, there was no man.” There was no Adam. Adam’s race would never produce a second Adam. There was no one whose repentance would satisfy the justice of God. We were all half-hearted! (at best!!) At the cross of Jesus we see the heavens above become dark. Creation itself lamenting the passion of its impassible Creator – now hanging suspended between heaven and earth! Chapter four concludes with a painful contrast between two women:

c. The Two Women (v29-31) The first is the Jerusalem that now is.

i) The Painted Whore – the Jerusalem that Now Is (v29-31)

And so the desolate one – Jerusalem – dresses herself in scarlet, paints her eyes, and seeks to seduce her invaders. It’s a pathetic last ditch effort to save herself. But it doesn’t work. And so we hear the final ‘kiy’ – the final reason in our chapter:

ii) For I Heard a Cry as of a Woman in Labor – the Jerusalem Above (v31)

In Revelation 12, we see the glorious Zion – the heavenly Jerusalem – giving birth to her firstborn child. There is a dragon there, waiting to kill the child – but her child was caught up to God – and she fled into the wilderness. Jeremiah does not see the end of the story. He only hears the first part – the woman in labor – the cry of the daughter of Zion. Many see verse 31 as the dying cry of the whore. I cannot. Whenever the prophets speak of the cry of the woman in labor with her firstborn child – it is the heavenly Zion. After all, the earthly Zion has had plenty of children! And all of them are, at best, half-hearted in their repentance. Jeremiah hears the cry of the heavenly Zion – as she is in labor with her firstborn son. 14 But will she survive? Will he survive? The very next verse will say, “Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note!

Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.” In the incarnation – and in the cross – God has found the one man who does justice and seeks truth. Therefore, to you who have fled to Jesus – and who trust in him for salvation – I declare to you, your sins are forgiven!

TEXT: Jeremiah 5:1-30

TITLE: AVENGING APOSTASY

BIG IDEA:

GOD MUST PUNISH THOSE WHO FORSAKE HIM AND REFUSE TO REPENT

INTRODUCTION:

Here we see clearly that the proper recompense for forsaking God is divine judgment. It is a sad situation when God cannot find a single person in Jerusalem who is characterized by truth and social justice. This despite all of God's efforts to graciously choose, cultivate and prosper His covenant people. Their treachery goes beyond even the depravity of surrounding pagan cultures because they were gifted with much more opportunity to know God and His ways. Despite divine discipline, they persisted in their stubborn rebellion and left God no choice but to avenge Himself against their apostasy.

Mackay: The chapter is therefore by way of theodicy, justifying God's sweeping action against his own people.

Kidner: There is a straight line from apostasy to disaster, from sin to death.

GOD MUST PUNISH THOSE WHO FORSAKE HIM AND REFUSE TO REPENT

I. (:1-6) ANALYSIS OF APOSTASY

A. (:1-3) Description of Apostasy

1. (:1-3a) Systemic Corruption -- No Truth to Be Found

a. Search for Truth – Can one righteous person be found?

*“Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, And look now, and take note. And seek in her open squares, If you can find a man, If there is one who does justice, who **seeks truth**, Then I will pardon her.”*

Thompson: Comparison with **Gen. 18:23-32** indicates that whereas in the days of Abraham God would have spared Sodom for ten men, he offers easier terms by far to Jerusalem even though Jerusalem's sins exceeded those of Sodom (**cf. 15:1-4; Ezek. 16:48**). . . *"Justice"* and *"truth"* are two terms that often appear together in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. They are covenant qualities that govern relations between people and God and between people and other people.

What does apostasy look like today?

Who is standing in the gap for the cause of righteousness?

David Guzik: One may also say that God today still searches and looks for one man who executes judgment and who seeks the truth – and finds only the One Man, Jesus Christ. He is the One Man who can save any city or individual from judgment.

b. Swearing Loyalty is False

“And although they say, 'As the LORD lives,' Surely they swear falsely.”

Calvin: This is added by way of anticipation; for the Jews, as it is well known, thought that they had a cover for all their vices, inasmuch as they had God’s name continually in their mouths. Since then they professed to worship the God of Abraham, they thought that this pretext was sufficient to cover all their wickedness. The Prophet obviates this objection, and shews that this disguise was of no avail, because in thus using God’s name, they profaned it: and he goes still further; for he shews that the Jews, not only in common practice, were wholly destitute of the fear of God, but that when anything of a religious kind appeared among them, it was sacrilegious; and this is far worse than when God’s name is forgotten, and wretched men allow themselves a full license in sinning, as though they could not conceal their wickedness: for when they openly provoke God, and as it were dishonor him to his face, how detestable and how monstrous is their impiety!

c. Standard is Truth = Faithful Covenant Loyalty

“O LORD, do not Thine eyes look for truth?”

2. (:3b) Stubborn Rebellion -- No Right Response to Corrective Discipline

“Thou hast smitten them, But they did not weaken; Thou hast consumed them, But they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; They have refused to repent.”

B. (:4-5) Degree of Apostasy – Across All Strata of Society

1. (:4) Low Status (Common) People Have Broken God’s Covenant

*“Then I said, ‘They are only **the poor**, They are foolish; For they do not know the way of the LORD Or the ordinance of their God.’”*

The poor – probably in status in society – the common people

2. (:5) High Status (Leaders) People Have Broken God’s Covenant

*“I will go to **the great** And will speak to them, For they know the way of the LORD, And the ordinance of their God. But they too, with one accord, have broken the yoke And burst the bonds.”*

The great are the leaders – the men of high standing in the society; men of high station

C. (:6) Danger of Apostasy

*“Therefore a **lion** from the forest shall slay them,
A **wolf** of the deserts shall destroy them,*

*A leopard is watching their cities.
Everyone who goes out of them shall be torn in pieces,
- Because their transgressions are many,
- Their apostasies are numerous.”*

MacArthur: Three animals which tear and eat their victims represented the invader: the lion, the wolf, and the leopard, picturing vicious judgment on both poor (v.4) and great (v.5).

Feinberg: The lion represents strength, the desert wolf ravenousness, and the leopard swiftness – all traits of the Babylonians.

II. (:7-13) JUSTIFICATION FOR JUDGMENT

A. (:7-8) Blatant Spiritual Adultery

“Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken Me And sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, They committed adultery And trooped to the harlot's house. They were well-fed lusty horses, Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife.”

Thompson: The picture in vv. 7 and 8 is of men who began with irregular sexual relationships in the harlot's house and then moved on to adultery. Jeremiah was depicting a crumbling society in open revolt against both the commandments of Yahweh and the fundamental laws of conscience.

Goodness of God should have led them to repentance; but instead fed their spiritual complacency and hubris

Feinberg: God's bounty to the people evoked not gratitude but a greater desire for idolatry. Material blessings only made them feel secure in their sins.

Calvin: Now this passage teaches us, that they who go astray, when allured by God's paternal kindness and bounty, are on that account the more unworthy of pardon. When men grow wanton against God, while he is kindly indulging them, they no doubt treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, as Paul tells us in **Romans 2:5**. Let us then take heed, lest we indulge ourselves, while God is, as it were, indulging us; and lest prosperity should lead us to wantonness: but let us learn to submit ourselves willingly to him, even because he thus kindly and sweetly invites us to himself; and when he shews himself so loving, let us learn to love him.

B. (:9-10) But Leave a Remnant

“Shall I not punish these people,” declares the LORD, ‘And on a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself? Go up through her vine rows and destroy, But do not execute a complete destruction; Strip away her branches, For they are not the LORD's.’”

Longman: Here we have another reference to the remnant theme (see 3:12-18; 4:27-28). God's people will not be totally eradicated in this judgment.

C. (:11-13) Blind Denial of Accountability

*“For the house of Israel and the house of Judah Have dealt very treacherously with Me,’ declares the LORD. ‘They have lied about the LORD And said, Not He; Misfortune will not come on us; And we will not see sword or famine. And the prophets are as wind, And the word is not in them. **Thus it will be done to them!**”*

Ryken: These poor people were in spiritual denial. They doubted that God judges sin or rules in history. For all their religious talk, they refused to follow God. Their worship was false because they did not give glory to God in their hearts.

Thompson: Here was blind complacency. The people, forgetful that breach of covenant would result in the operation of the curses of the covenant, that is, divine judgment, and stressing rather the privileges of covenant membership than its obligations, had deluded themselves into thinking that somehow the God of the covenant would overlook breaches of the covenant.

David Guzik: Several commentators believe the phrase the prophets have become *windrefers* to how the people regarded the true prophets of God – regarding them only as **windbags**.

Feinberg: they deny God's intervention and even his interest in their ways. They were practical atheists.

III. (:14-17) DECREE OF DESTRUCTION

A. (:14) Powerful Prophecy of Destruction

“Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, ‘Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire And this people wood, and it will consume them.”

Mackay: Jeremiah as the Lord's spokesman is reassured that his message is genuine and will be backed up by a display of divine power.

Calvin: This passage ought to be carefully observed by us, lest by our ingratitude we shall so provoke God's wrath against us, as that his word, which is destined for our food, shall be turned to be a fire to us. For why has God appointed the ministers of his gospel, except to invite us to become partakers of his salvation, and thus sweetly to restore and refresh our souls? And thus the word of God is to us like water to revive our hearts: it is also a fire, but for our good, a cleansing, and not a consuming fire: but if we obstinately reject this fire, it will surely turn to answer another end, even to devour us, and wholly to consume us.

B. (:15-17) Powerful People (Instrument) of Destruction

1. (:15-16) Description of the Mighty Enemy

“Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel,’ declares the LORD. ‘It is an enduring nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say. Their quiver is like an open grave, All of them are mighty men.”

Feinberg: The description of the foe is both accurate and detailed. Five of their characteristics are given:

- (1) Distant
- (2) Ancient
- (3) Enduring
- (4) Unintelligible in speech
- (5) Deadly in war

2. (:17) Destruction by the Mighty Enemy

*“And they will **devour** your harvest and your food;
They will **devour** your sons and your daughters;
They will **devour** your flocks and your herds;
They will **devour** your vines and your fig trees;
They will **demolish** with the sword your fortified cities in which you trust.”*

Repeated use of word “*devour*” to show the extent of the coming destruction.

IV. (:18-30) REFLECTION ON DIVINE RECKONING

A. (:18) Left Behind (Remnant) Theology

“Yet even in those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will not make you a complete destruction.”

B. (:19) Legacy Instruction

“And it shall come about when they say, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?’ then you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours.”

Feinberg: There is a direct relation between the nation’s sin and its punishment – viz., recompense in kind, *lex talionis* (Deut 28:47-48).

C. (:20-24) Lack of Fear of God

1. (:20-22) First Argument from Nature

“Declare this in the house of Jacob And proclaim it in Judah, saying, ‘Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, Who have eyes, but see not; Who have ears, but hear not. Do you not fear Me?’ declares the LORD. ‘Do you not tremble in My presence? For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea, An eternal decree, so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss, yet they cannot prevail; Though they roar, yet they cannot cross over it.”

Mackay: The people have become like the idols of the alien gods whom they have been serving. (Is. 6:9-10; Ps. 94:7-9)

MacArthur: God's providential acts in the natural world such as

- 1) Creating the seashore to prevent flooding,
- 2) Giving rain at the appropriate times (v.24), and
- 3) Providing time for harvest (v.24)

are witness enough to the Lord's reality and grace. As the nation turns away from God, He will take these unappreciated gifts away (v.25).

Feinberg: The language is purposely blunt to awaken the people to their dangerous condition. How can they be so obtuse concerning the truth that God is Creator, Provider, and Judge?

2. (:23-24) Second Argument from Nature

"But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; They have turned aside and departed. They do not say in their heart, 'Let us now fear the LORD our God, Who gives rain in its season, Both the autumn rain and the spring rain, Who keeps for us The appointed weeks of the harvest.'"

Longman: Jeremiah denounces the people since they do not treat the Lord with the proper awe. Jeremiah now invokes creation themes in order to support this idea. God is the one who bounded the sea with the **sand** in order to make the dry land. The sea represents the power of chaos, but God firmly pushes back chaos to allow the order of creation to exist. Further, God is the provider of the life-giving **rains** (v. 24). This reference is particularly germane, since the people of God are tempted to worship a god like Baal who is a storm deity. Their sins have deprived them of **good**, like the crops.

D. (:25-28) Leeches Pursue Wickedness for Profit and Exploit the Vulnerable

"Your iniquities have turned these away, And your sins have withheld good from you. For wicked men are found among My people, They watch like fowlers lying in wait; They set a trap, They catch men. Like a cage full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit; Therefore they have become great and rich. They are fat, they are sleek, They also excel in deeds of wickedness; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; And they do not defend the rights of the poor."

Mackay: It is significant that the arguments presented here are not from the word and promise of God, or his past deeds of salvation, but from his natural power (over the sea) and goodness (harvest). This is testimony that is available even to those without special revelation (**Rom. 1:20**). Its use here indicates that because of their spiritual immaturity the covenant people have to be approached by the prophet at a very elementary level.

Longman: **Wicked men** exist among God's people who catch people in their **traps** as a fowler traps birds. They use deceit, just as bird traps, hidden in the environment, catch

birds unaware. Those caught are killed and used for the profit of the fowler. These wicked men have become very **rich and powerful** through their evil behavior.

Exploitation like hunters snaring bird

E. (:29-30) Last Word

“Shall I not punish these people?’ declares the LORD, ‘On a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?’ An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so! But what will you do at the end of it?’”

Mackay: Matters would not always continue as they had done. The people are being called on to reflect on the culmination of their present course of conduct. *“If only they were wise and would understand this and discern what their end will be!” (Deut. 32:29).* *“What will you do in the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar?” (Isa. 10:3).*

Constable: The Lord announced that an appalling and horrible thing had happened in Judah. The prophets did not deliver the Lord’s messages, but instead preached what the people wanted to hear. Also, the priests conducted worship as they thought best, rather than as the Lord had specified. But instead of revolting against these misleaders, the people loved their apostate behavior. Yet, the Lord asked, what would they do in the end?

Woodrow Kroll: That was God's warning to Israel. They were being misled by those who were responsible for their spiritual welfare. The prophets and priests were telling the people only what they wanted to hear, which was fine with them. They didn't want to be confronted with their sins. They loved the sugarcoated messages and the false assurances. But God inquired, "What will you do in the end?" What will you do when reality knocks on the door and you no longer can continue to deny the truth? Everything that begins has an end...and then what will you do?

Feinberg: So the chapter closes with the tragic statement that those entrusted with the spiritual welfare of the nation were unworthy of their positions. Worse yet, the people were so unaware of the issues that they acquiesced in all that their leaders did. The rampant evil did not trouble the people, who had come to accept it and favor it. They preferred indulgent leaders who made few, if any, moral demands. The people had lost all sense of moral values and did not realize they were being duped. They cherished their false security. But the final question is, In the time of retribution, when the calamity would strike, then what would they do? Then where would their hope and confidence be?

Consider your end!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What can we do to better pursue truth and justice and avoid hypocrisy and complacency?
- 2) Where are we not facing reality about our accountability before the Lord or about areas where we have failed to maintain our loyalty to Him?
- 3) What should all mankind be learning from God's goodness and power displayed in His creation?
- 4) Why should we expect God to avenge Himself on those who commit apostasy?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thompson: Before the theme of the foe from the north is resumed in **5:15**, there is a further discussion of the reasons for the coming judgment, a subject that has already been dealt with in **ch. 2**. Israel's blatant rejection of the sovereignty of Yahweh and of his covenant was the basic cause. Once she had abandoned Yahweh and acknowledged some other sovereignty over her life it was inevitable that the curses of the covenant should become operative. If the people would not see this, Jeremiah, at least, understood the painful truth. There is, perhaps, a greater emphasis in **ch. 5** on moral evils than in **ch. 2**. But moral and religious evils are finally inseparable since they stem from a common cause.

Parunak: Summary of the People's Sin

Now we can work our way back through the chain of sins that leads to rejecting the true God. Along the way, watch out for ourselves!

1. **26-28a**, Oppressing others. Horizontal sins; the "second table of the law." Sins against man.
2. **28b**, Perverting the standards of justice in order to justify our sin.
3. **23-24**, When the Lord withholds blessing, responding by not fearing him.
4. **12-13, 31**, Once one stops fearing God, it is easier to reject his Word, and encouraging false teachers to pervert it to suit our tastes, in support of our self-serving standards of justice.
5. **7-8, 19**, Spiritual adultery after false gods.

Mackay: The action involved is the prerogative of one in authority who acts to ensure that his position is not infringed. It is a legitimate use of power to vindicate his rights and punish those who have violated them. "*I will take vengeance on my adversaries and repay those who hate me*" (**Deut. 32:42**). Such action is a necessary correlate of divine holiness, since the God of purity cannot remain true to himself if he permits sin and iniquity to go unpunished, especially when the offences are directly against known commands. The offer of grace and forgiveness is not held open indefinitely: if

repeatedly spurned it will be withdrawn, because the Sovereign God must act to promote his dominion over his people and over the nations. So he cannot overlook the violations of his covenant that are to be found in Jerusalem.

Brian Bell: Lures of Satan and How to Resist

Let's look into Satan's tackle box & look at some of his lures:

- The Lure of Wealth (27b);
- another lure of being well fed & well groomed (28);

Q: Have we swallowed some of these Lures of the enemy? Amazing Satan doesn't use any new tricks

Here's 4 steps on "How Not to Bite"?

- [1] Look beyond the present "reward" to "the end"!
- [2] Expose others to their end!
- [3] Have the spirit of Neh. Who said, "*but I did not do so, because of the fear of God.*" (Neh.5:15)
- [4] To yield our heart & soul to the "Better Attraction" of Christ & His cross, till we say, "you are mine exceeding joy!"

Peter Wallace: My People Love to Have It So: Why Do We Love Lies?

Why do we believe lies? Often we know that they are lies – and we believe them anyway. But sometimes we are so deceived that we believe a lie – thinking that it is the truth!

This morning we heard the three temptations of Israel in the wilderness – warnings that Israel not "say in their hearts" these three things.

Tonight Jeremiah says, "They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the LORD our God.'" (v24) If we feared the LORD our God, then we would not love and believe lies. This is at the heart of the message that Jeremiah preaches to Jerusalem.

Back in chapter 3, verse 6, we were told that this message came "in the days of King Josiah." In chapter 7, verse 1, we will hear a new message. So chapters 3 through 6 appear to be the basic message that Jeremiah preached in the days of King Josiah.

This is where I need to introduce a unique feature of the book of Jeremiah! The book of Jeremiah is the only book of the Bible that exists in two different forms. There is the Babylonian text – which our Bible follows; and then there is the Alexandrian text – which the Septuagint follows. The western church uses the Babylonian text. The eastern church uses the Alexandrian text. And we have found ancient Hebrew manuscripts from before Christ of both texts. Let me say right up front that this is old news. The church has always known about these two different texts. The western church and the eastern church have disagreed about which one to use – but since there is no theological difference between the texts, no one has ever thought that it was a big deal!

The reason why I bring it up now is because we have to a place where it matters! Jeremiah 7, verse 1, reads very differently in the Alexandrian text. In the Babylonian text (the one you have in front of you) it clearly marks a new section (The word that came to Jeremiah f 2 In other words, in the Alexandrian text (followed by the LXX), chapter 7 simply continues the message of chapter 6. In the Babylonian text (followed by the Masoretes), chapter 7 introduces a new message.

I should take some time to explain this – because it’s really helpful for understanding the book of Jeremiah. Who wrote the book of Jeremiah? Much of the book is written in the first person – “the word of the LORD came to me” – but then there are these interesting third person references (like 7:1). Some of those third person references are also in the Alexandrian version, but others are not. Where did they come from? It’s worth noting that the author of the book is anonymous. Jeremiah plainly wrote (or dictated) large portions of the book. But there are several sections that are plainly written by someone else about Jeremiah. With many books of the Bible, we just don’t know the name of the person who wrote them. Who wrote the book of Kings? We don’t know. But we do know from Jeremiah 36 that Baruch, his scribe, wrote much of the book at the dictation of Jeremiah, so Baruch is a likely author for the narrative sections that speak in the third person .

But there are certain parts of the book of Jeremiah that don’t occur in the Alexandrian text. The Alexandrian text is about 15% shorter than the Babylonian text. The content of the two textual traditions is very much the same. Through the middle of Jeremiah 25, these two texts are very similar. After Jeremiah 25, they have mostly the same material – but organized very differently – and edited somewhat differently. So it seems clear that Jeremiah 1-25 existed in a coherent form before Jeremiah left Jerusalem, and that the second half of Jeremiah existed as something of a loose set of papers. After all, the same content is found in both textual traditions – it is just organized differently, and edited differently – with two distinct voices doing the editing. Two editors compiled the papers in different orders. It is possible that Jeremiah did this himself, but the text of Jeremiah points in a different direction. Baruch, the scribe, and his brother, Seraiah. It is at least curious that Seraiah is only mentioned in the Babylonian text! Seraiah is referred to in one passage in Jeremiah – Jeremiah 51:59-64 – a passage directed towards the Babylonian exiles:

Turn over to Jeremiah 51:59, and you will see: 59 The word that Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah king of Judah to Babylon, in the fourth year of his reign. Seraiah was the quartermaster. 60 Jeremiah wrote in a book all the disaster that should come upon Babylon, all these words that are written concerning Babylon. 61 And Jeremiah said to Seraiah: “When you come to Babylon, see that you read all these words, 62 and say, ‘O LORD, you have said concerning this place that you will cut it off, so that nothing shall dwell in it, neither man nor beast, and it shall be desolate forever.’ 63 When you finish reading this book, tie a stone to it and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates, 64 and say, ‘Thus shall Babylon sink, to rise no more, because of the disaster that I am bringing upon her, and they shall become exhausted.’”

So, according to the text of Jeremiah, Seraiah was specially commissioned by Jeremiah to take his message to Babylon (and while the first task was to drop a copy of the book in the Euphrates river, one presumes that Seraiah was also supposed to bring Jeremiah's words to the Jewish exiles in Babylon!). Baruch, on the other hand, goes with Jeremiah to Egypt. So, according to the text of Jeremiah, we have two brothers – Baruch and Seraiah – both of whom are closely associated with the ministry of Jeremiah – and both of whom are responsible for writing down the prophecies of Jeremiah and bringing his message to two different groups of people – one in Egypt and one in Babylon. And we have two texts – the Septuagint text (and the Septuagint was translated in Egypt), and the Masoretic text (which has strong connections with the Babylonian diaspora). That's why I call them the "Babylonian" text and the "Alexandrian" text. It's not that one is Hebrew, the other is Greek – we have Hebrew manuscripts of both – from the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Now, I know that someone is going to ask, "but which one is inspired?!!" My answer is "both." After all, while there is immense difference in the order of prophecies – and there is quite a bit of material in the Masoretic text 4 that is not found in the Septuagint text – there are no substantial differences between them. Seraiah was commissioned to write down the words of Jeremiah and go to Babylon. His brother, Baruch, went with Jeremiah to Egypt. Chapters 1-25 were already in place before the brothers parted. The brothers then used essentially the same material as they wrote out the rest, but arranged it in different order.

Think about the gospel writers. They plainly took the words of Jesus and wrote them out in different ways – and at times for different theological reasons! So why not Baruch and Seraiah? Some might say, then why not have 1 and 2 Jeremiah in our Bibles? Well, I suppose you could – but the differences between 1-2 Jeremiah are so miniscule that it would be a waste of time and paper. It would be better to say that whichever version of Jeremiah you read, you are reading the Word of God. But these two different textual traditions have existed side-by-side for over 2,000 years. (Anyone who tells you that this is a "new" problem that "suddenly" casts doubt on the scriptures doesn't know what they are talking about! The church has known about these two texts for 2,000 years, and has never thought that it was a problem!) Indeed, I think that this is a very helpful gift that God has given us – because it gives us a window into how God inspired the scriptures. It wasn't through some sort of mechanical dictation by the Holy Spirit. It was through the very ordinary process of a prophet and his scribes writing down his sermons and editing them to communicate to a different audience.

We need to remember that the canon – the standard for our life and doctrine – is the prophetic word – the apostolic teaching. When that word is faithfully communicated – whether in writing or in preaching – whether in "literal" translation or in faithful paraphrase – you are hearing (or reading) the Word of God. Now, if you didn't fully "get" what I just said – don't worry! The whole "two Jeremiahs" thing will come up over and over throughout our series, so I'll explain it again from time to time.

But to come back to our point for tonight! In the Alexandrian text, chapters 1-10 fit together as a single unit. What this means is that Jeremiah's message about Jerusalem (chapters 7-10) was probably preached in Josiah's day as a part of his message about the coming judgment on Judah. But in the Babylonian text, chapters 1-6 are set apart as the introductory message – leaving aside the Jerusalem material in chapters 7-10. What does that do? Well, chapters 3-6 are highlighting the relationship between Israel and Judah – even in our own passage tonight, verse 11 speaks of “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” and verse 20 speaks to “the house of Jacob” and also to Judah. By dividing chapters 7-10 off and calling it a separate section, the focus of Jeremiah's opening message is on Judah and Israel – with a second message about Jerusalem.

After putting together the outline in the bulletin, I discovered another structure that seems better! Notice 5:9 and 5:29. “Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?” Then in 5:10 and 5:19 there is the declaration of coming judgment, combined with a promise that God will not make a “full end” of them. And at the center of the passage (verses 14-17) you see God's declaration that he has made his word “in your mouth a fire” which will consume his people. So what do you see at the beginning and the end of the passage? Verse 2 – “Though they say, As the LORD lives, yet they swear falsely” Verse 31 – “The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?” We saw this a couple weeks ago in chapter 3 – when we looked at “false repentance” (returning to the LORD in ‘pretense’). So the passage begins and ends with Jerusalem and her prophets swearing and preaching falsely.

Next God speaks of how he should avenge himself on a nation like this. And while he will bring destruction – he will not make a full end of them. And at the center of the text? The word of the LORD is a fire in Jeremiah's mouth which will consume God's so-called “people.” 6 Think about that for a minute. The word of Jeremiah – “my words in your mouth” – will consume Israel. Yes, they will die by the sword of Babylon – but the sword of Babylon is only a servant of the sword that goes out of the mouth of the LORD. Jesus said that he came to bring fire on the earth! Revelation 18-20 speaks of the destruction of Babylon – by the sword that comes out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus.

1. The Search for a Repentant Man (5:1-5)

a. “Harder Than Rock” – the Impenitence of Jerusalem (v1-3)

Verses 1-5 describe Jeremiah's search for a repentant man in Jerusalem. Is there one who does justice and seeks truth? If there was one man who did justice and sought truth, then God might pardon her. Remember Sodom and Gomorrah? Abraham had prayed that God would pardon Sodom if he could find ten righteous. Then I said, “These are only the poor; they have no sense; for they do not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God. 5 I will go to the great and will speak to them, for they know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God.”

b. They all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds. vv.4-5

Again, this is said in the days of king Josiah – the greatest king Jerusalem ever saw! Jeremiah cannot find one man who does justice and seeks truth – he cannot find one man who repents – who turns to the LORD with a whole heart. The great were no better than the poor. “All alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bonds.”

Jeremiah’s message is very much like Paul’s in Romans 3: “There is no one who seeks after God.” “All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.” Many would say, Oh, but what about you, Jeremiah! Or how about the young Ezekiel! Surely there were a few who were faithful! Doing justice and seeking truth is not about “being a good person.” After all, the purpose of God’s law was so that righteousness and justice would characterize the whole earth. Jeremiah is looking for that one man whose doing justice and seeking truth will enable God to forgive Jerusalem.

Josiah was a good king – a great Reformer! He was the best king that the earthly Jerusalem ever had. But as we saw at the end of chapter 4, the earthly Jerusalem is a whore. And even Josiah wasn’t good enough. What would Josiah have thought if he had heard Jeremiah’s sermon? Well, if Josiah was as good a king as the Bible says (and we should believe the Bible!) then Josiah would have responded to this sermon by saying, “Yeah, I know what you mean. I keep trying to do my best to do justice and seek truth – but trying to reform Jerusalem – trying to establish righteousness in Judah, is like trying to herd cats. Everyone pays lip service to my reforms – but the high places keep coming back – and after I’m gone, I’m not so sure about my sons... And even more, if we’re barely making headway among the people of Judah – how are we ever supposed to bring the good news of the kingdom to the nations?”

c. Therefore a Lion Shall Strike Them Down Because of Their Apostasies (v6)

In verses 7-13, God then explains why he cannot forgive Jerusalem.

2. How Can God Pardon Impenitent Apostates? (5:7-13)

a. Apostasy Is Like Adultery (v7-9)

Apostasy is like adultery. The children of Zion have worshiped other gods. When God provided all that they needed, they reacted by turning away from him and serving other gods. And God is like a jilted husband who will avenge himself on his faithless people.

b. Prophets Becoming Wind: The Treachery of Israel and Judah (v10-13)

And so God will destroy the house of Judah (like he did the house of Israel). It’s fascinating to hear how the people speak of the prophets: “The prophets will become wind [ruach]; the word is not in them.” The word “ruach” can be translated either spirit, wind, or breath. They think that the prophets are just empty wind! But listen to God’s response in verses 14-17!

3. “A Fire in Your Mouth” – Jeremiah’s Proclamation of the Coming Judgment (5:14-17)

This is the heart of chapter 5 – and perhaps even the heart of Jeremiah’s calling as a prophet. My words are a fire in your mouth – a fire that will consume the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Think back to what God told Elijah – Elijah was to anoint

Jehu as king of Israel, Hazael as king of Syria, and Elisha as prophet: all three were to destroy Israel! “And the one who escapes for the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death.” (1 Kings 19:17)

Of course, Elisha never killed anyone! But the word that Elisha proclaimed was the Word of the LORD that announced the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. And that word was accomplished. In the same way, the word of Jeremiah never burnt anyone! But the fire that proceeded from the mouth of Jeremiah 10 consumed Jerusalem and all Judah: 15 Behold, I am bringing against you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say. 16 Their quiver is like an open tomb; they are all mighty warriors. 17 They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees; your fortified cities in which you trust they shall beat down with the sword.”

4. “Not...a Full End” – the Purpose of the Exile (5:18-31)

But God promises in verse 18 that he will not make a full end of Jerusalem. He will destroy – but not utterly. There is a reason for all of this – there is a purpose which Jerusalem must learn from. You must learn to worship and serve the LORD – and him only!

And verses 20-28 provide two basic lessons – first, learn from the patterns of creation – and second, learn from the patterns of history!

a. “Do You Not Fear Me?” – Learn from the Patterns of Creation (v20-25)

In verses 20-25, you are called to learn from the patterns of creation. Just look around you: God has placed the sand as a boundary for the sea. God has ordered creation as a place for freedom within boundaries. The “sea” often is used as a picture of the nations. Jeremiah wants Jerusalem to see that the raging of the nations is like the raging of the sea. Sure, it’s noisy and a little scary! The sea is wild and untameable! But God has ordered creation (and history) in such a way that all things work together for good to those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose. Learn to say in your heart, “Let us fear the LORD our God.” He is faithful in the patterns of creation. And also, learn from the vengeance of God in history (v26-29):

b. “Like a Cage Full of Birds” – Learn from the Vengeance of God (v26-29)

The prophets generally start by going after the idolatry of God’s people – but idolatry invariably leads to violations of the rest of God’s commands. Jeremiah had started chapter 5 asking whether there was a man who did justice and sought truth. The chapter concludes that no there is no justice. And so God asks: 29 Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?” Jeremiah repeats verse 9. Just as verses 6-8 used the adultery and idolatry theme in order to show how the LORD is like a jealous husband, now verses 26-28 use the injustice and oppression theme in order to show how the LORD must bring vengeance

against those who continually squash God's people. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay!

Conclusion: "My People Love to Have It So" (5:30-31)

We love to hear the prophets and priests conspire together to tell us what we want to hear. But what will you do when the end comes?

TEXT: Jeremiah 6:1-30

TITLE: REJECTED SILVER

BIG IDEA:

STUBBORN REBELLION YIELDS DEVASTATING DESTRUCTION

INTRODUCTION:

The Lord will not hold back His judgment forever. There comes a time when it is too late to try to flee for safety. Those immersed in wickedness will no longer be able to hide behind the empty platitudes of “I’m OK, you’re OK.” There will be no partiality shown by the Lord in His anger – no granting of exemptions based on family pedigree or social or economic status. Stubborn rebellion will be exposed and condemned for what it is.

Note structural marker of repetition of phrase “*Thus says the Lord of hosts.*”

Feinberg: The striking feature of this chapter is its rapidity of movement leading to the gathering storm of invasion soon to engulf the capital and the land. It has been called a chapter of alarms; it begins on a note of impending doom and concludes with the utter rejection of the people.

STUBBORN REBELLION YIELDS DEVASTATING DESTRUCTION

I. (:1-8) DIVINE JUDGMENT IS COMING

It is a mistake to think that God’s judgment will not fall.

A. (:1-3) Alert – Divine Judgment on the Horizon -- Enemy Coming from the North to Destroy

“Flee for safety, O sons of Benjamin, From the midst of Jerusalem! Now blow a trumpet in Tekoa, And raise a signal over Beth-haccerem; For evil looks down from the north, And a great destruction. The comely and dainty one, the daughter of Zion, I will cut off. Shepherds and their flocks will come to her, They will pitch their tents around her, They will pasture each in his place.”

Constable: Tekoa, of all the northern Judean cities, may have been selected for literary reasons. In Hebrew its name, *teqoa*, is very similar to the word translated “*blow the trumpet*,” *tiq’u*. Beth-haccerem may have been chosen for the meaning of its name, since Jeremiah often referred to Judah as “*Yahweh’s vineyard*.”

Jerusalem’s beauty and attractiveness would not save her; area will become so desolated that it will be pastureland for flocks of shepherds

The United States should not imagine that her central role in God’s evangelical program will excuse her from coming judgment. Look at the warning signs. Look at the alerts. Look at the signal flags.

B. (:4-5) Attack – Divine Judgment Will Be Relentless -- Enemy Called to Attack Jerusalem – at Noon and at Night

“Prepare war against her; Arise, and let us attack at noon. Woe to us, for the day declines, For the shadows of the evening lengthen! Arise, and let us attack by night And destroy her palaces!”

Appetite for attacking Jerusalem cannot be satiated – attack continues day and night

Mackay: So well has their campaign gone that they see no obstacle as capable of impeding their progress. Why not have a night attack? Their mood is one of self-assurance and they are eager to bring matters to a conclusion.

C. (:6-8) Argument – Divine Judgment Matches the Crime

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Cut down her trees, And cast up a siege against Jerusalem. This is the city to be punished, In whose midst there is only oppression. As a well keeps its waters fresh, So she keeps fresh her wickedness. Violence and destruction are heard in her; Sickness and wounds are ever before Me. Be warned, O Jerusalem, Lest I be alienated from you; Lest I make you a desolation, A land not inhabited.’”

Utley: “Cut down her trees” -- In **Deut. 20:19-20**, trees were used to build siege instruments, ramps, firewood, etc., for invading armies. Also the destruction of all of the fruit trees is an idiom of total, complete desolation!

Mackay: Oppression was an abuse of power to deprive others of their property or rights, perhaps with a semblance of legality but in fact without thought for the morality of the situation, and oppression had been prohibited from earliest times (**Lev. 19:13**) and was vehemently criticized by the prophets (**Isa. 30:12; 59:13; Ezek. 22:7, 12, 29**).

Application: Take heed to Divine warnings.

II. (:9-15) DIVINE JUDGMENT IS UNAVOIDABLE

It is a mistake to think that God’s judgment can be avoided.

(:9) No Passover This Time

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘They will thoroughly glean as the vine the remnant of Israel; Pass your hand again like a grape gatherer Over the branches.’”

The gleaning of judgment will be complete and thorough – no grapes remaining

A. (:10-11a) No Holding Back God’s Wrath

1. (:10) Warning Because of Rejection of Word of God

“To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Behold, their ears are closed, And they cannot listen. Behold, the word of the LORD has become a reproach to them; They have no delight in it.”

Longman: The NIV rather banally translates the third colon of v. 10 as **their ears are closed**. The Hebrew has the rich metaphor: “*their ear has foreskin.*” In other words, they have uncircumcised ears. Circumcision is the ritual of cutting away the foreskin of the penis and was a sign of the Abrahamic covenant (**Gen. 17:9-14**). To be circumcised indicated one who was in covenant with God, and to have a foreskin meant to be outside of the covenant. Thus, we can see that the image of ears with foreskin means more than simply that they do not pay attention to God, it means that they are unclean, outside of the covenant.

2. (:11a) Wrath About to be Poured Out
“*But I am full of the wrath of the LORD: I am weary with holding it in. Pour it out on the children in the street, And on the gathering of young men together;*”

B. (:11b-15) No Exemptions

1. (:11b-12) Universal Judgment -- No Partiality
“*For both husband and wife shall be taken, The aged and the very old. And their houses shall be turned over to others, Their fields and their wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against **the inhabitants of the land,**’ declares the LORD.*”
2. (:13) Universal Culpability – No Godly Value System
“*For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, **Everyone** is greedy for gain, And from the prophet even to the priest.*”
3. (:14) Universal Promotion of False Security – No Facing Reality
“***Everyone** deals falsely. And they have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace.*”

Mackay: The repetition of “*peace*” here suggests it is a quote of a slogan used to effect ideological inculcation and to stifle any glimmering perception of the reality of the situation in the city. The establishment theology preached in Jerusalem assured the people that all would be well, that is, that through the existing regime the blessing of God would rest upon their living and their actions. This was based on an inadequate appreciation of the covenant because they divorced the blessings of the Overlord from the obedience of his subjects and assumed there was an absolute divine commitment which automatically extended *salom* to Jerusalem and its inhabitants. But if the people of the covenant live in rebellion against God, they can expect not the blessings of the covenant but its curses. Those who should have been summoning the people to repentance were totally failing in their duty. As a result the community were unwilling assess the totality of their lifestyle in the light of God’s covenant demands, and did not appreciate the searching and inward dimensions of what he required from his people.

4. (:15) Universal Arrogance – No Embarrassment
“*Were they ashamed because of the abomination they have done? They were not even ashamed at all; They did not even know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time that I punish them, They shall be*

cast down,' says the LORD."

Application:

- **Obey God's Word – Listen to it; Delight in it; Don't be Ashamed of it**
- **Walk in God's Ways**
- **Don't presume against God's goodness and patience and longsuffering**
- **Embrace a godly value system**
- **Face up to reality – don't hide behind false securities**

III. (:16-21) DIVINE JUDGMENT IS DESERVED

It is a mistake to think that God's judgment is not fair. (vv.6-8 introduced this theme)

A. (:16-17) Stubborn Rebellion

1. (:16) Refuse to Walk in God's Ways

"Thus says the LORD, 'Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk in it.'"

2 possible tracks to take in life – God's way and the wrong way

Jesus offered rest to those who would choose the path of discipleship and take His yoke upon themselves (**Matt. 11:29**)

Mackay: Scripture frequently uses the metaphor of a path or road for the general conduct of one's life (**18:15; 21:8-9; 23:12; Deut. 30:15-20; Ps. 1:6; Prov. 4:10-14**). . . Their refusal does not focus on being unable to ascertain if a good way existed, or, if it did, where it was to be found. It is not a matter of knowledge, but of stubborn disinclination to acknowledge the Lord.

Feinberg: God always gives ample warning of coming judgment. The people's disobedience was threefold:

- (1) They were unfaithful to the covenant bond with God (v. 16 – "*We will not*");
- (2) They were unheeding of the warnings of the true prophets (v. 17 – "*We will not*");
- (3) And they rejected the law (v. 19)

2. (:17) Refuse to Listen to God's Warnings

"And I set watchmen over you, saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But they said, 'We will not listen.'"

B. (:18-19) Sorrowful Reaping = Harvest Law

"Therefore hear, O nations, And know, O congregation, what is among them. Hear, O earth: behold, I am bringing disaster on this people, The fruit of their plans, Because they have not listened to My words, And as for My law, they have rejected it also."

Thompson: God called for witnesses to hear the sentence of judgment he was about to pronounce against a people who had rejected his covenant.

C. (:20) Substituting Rituals in Vain

“For what purpose does frankincense come to Me from Sheba, And the sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, And your sacrifices are not pleasing to Me.”

Ryken: The people of Jerusalem were very religious. They were becoming sophisticated, fashionable, up-to-date, and contemporary in their worship. Their services were lavish and ornate. No expense was spared. They imported exotic perfumes by camel – frankincense from Saudi Arabia and calamus from India – in order to spice up their worship. They were on an insatiable quest for the “latest thing.” But their hearts had wandered far from God. . . “Ritual performance perfumed with imported incense will never hide the stench of moral disobedience.” (**John Guest**)

D. (:21) Stumbling Blocks

“Therefore, thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am laying stumbling blocks before this people. And they will stumble against them, Fathers and sons together; Neighbor and friend will perish.’”

God excels at creating obstacle courses

Mackay: *Obstacles* = Circumstances that the Lord puts before his people to test their loyalty. In themselves the obstacles do not induce the people to sin. Those who are living true to God’s commands will detect the problem ahead of them and deal with it appropriately.

Application: “We will not . . .” is never a good response to God’s commands.

IV. (:22-30) DIVINE JUDGMENT IS A BIG DEAL

It is a mistake to think that God’s judgment is no big deal.

A. (:22-26) A Big Deal Because of Its Destruction

1. (:22-23) Marked by Cruelty

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, a people is coming from the north land, And a great nation will be aroused from the remote parts of the earth. They seize bow and spear; They are cruel and have no mercy; Their voice roars like the sea, And they ride on horses, Arrayed as a man for the battle Against you, O daughter of Zion!’”

Thompson: This cruel, ruthless foe comes on relentlessly, mounted on chargers, drawn up in battle array, making a din like the roaring of the sea. It is a terrifying picture. One almost senses Yahweh’s own anguish that this relentless foe is arrayed against his daughter Zion. The one objective of that ruthless army is the destruction of the nation.

2. (:24-25) Marked by Terror

“We have heard the report of it; Our hands are limp. Anguish has seized us,

Pain as of a woman in childbirth. Do not go out into the field, And do not walk on the road, For the enemy has a sword, Terror is on every side.”

3. (:26) Marked by Mourning

“O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth And roll in ashes; Mourn as for an only son, A lamentation most bitter. For suddenly the destroyer Will come upon us.”

B. (:27-30) A Big Deal Because of its Destiny = Ultimate Divine Rejection

“I have made you an assayer and a tester among My people, That you may know and assay their way. All of them are stubbornly rebellious, Going about as a talebearer. They are bronze and iron; They, all of them, are corrupt. The bellows blow fiercely, The lead is consumed by the fire; In vain the refining goes on, But the wicked are not separated. They call them rejected silver, Because the LORD has rejected them.”

Feinberg: The last verses of the chapter focus on the nation’s incorrigibility. So that no one may think God has not given the people every chance, he is willing to have them tested for any merit or worth that may be in them (v. 27).

Constable: quoting **Craigie** -- the imagery is employed not to indicate that judgment would be a refining process but rather to convey its terminal nature; since no purity could be found, no solid silver, the mixture would be cast away as dross

Ryken: But even after they passed through the crucible of divine testing and felt the heat of divine judgment in the prophetic message, they proved to be nothing but dross, the slag of metallic waste.

Derek Kidner: It emerges that the people of Judah are not, so to speak, precious metal marred by some impurities, but base metal from which nothing of worth can be extracted.

Application: Choose obedience and joy rather than rebellion and mourning.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What type of social oppression is a major problem in the United States currently?
- 2) Where do we see church leaders greedy for gain instead of faithfully ministering God’s Word?
- 3) What type of false security is prevalent today in religious circles?
- 4) What types of religious rituals are we tempted to rely upon?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Utley: Notice the different titles for the covenant people (esp. Jerusalem).

1. "sons of Benjamin," **Jer. 6:1**
2. "the daughter of Zion," **Jer. 6:2,23**
3. "Jerusalem" **Jer. 6:6,8**
4. "the remnant of Israel," **Jer. 6:9**
5. "My people," **Jer. 6:14,27**
6. "O daughter of my people," **Jer. 6:26**

Mackay: We have now arrived at the end of the First Scroll. It concludes with the prophet recording the failure of his mission to bring the people back to the Lord. However, in terms of the commission that had been given to him, he has managed "to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow" (**1:10**). His exposure of the defection of the land and its corruption is thorough and mordant. There was no place left to hide from the light of his scathing critique of Judah and Jerusalem, of the people and particularly of the establishment figures in the land. When these prophecies were first issued, their message would have been far from welcome. But once Jeremiah has assembled the messages in the Scroll, it is far from surprising that the reading of the Scroll provoked such a hostile reaction from the king (**36:23**).

For Jeremiah himself there was the growing realization that divine revelation was two-edged. "For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task?" (**2 Cor. 2:15-16**). The prophet Isaiah had already been made aware that his ministry would be one that would lead not to insight and conviction of the truth but growing spiritual insensitivity among his hearers (**Isa. 6:9-13**).

Peter Wallace: The Ancient Paths

"To whom shall I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me?"

It's hard to imagine what the prophet Jeremiah went through. He is called as a prophet in the middle of the most glorious reform in Jerusalem's history, with the message that Josiah's repentance is not enough. Judgment is coming. He calls Jerusalem to repent – but he also proclaims that Jerusalem will not repent – and that it is too late.

He is called to listen to the sounds of the destruction of Jerusalem thirty years before the Babylonian army arrives. "To whom shall I speak and give warning?" "Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!" NO. We won't. Brothers and sisters – I say this to you (and to myself!) – Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet! There are lots of false prophets who are greedy for gain. There are many who will offer soft words and give you easy solutions. But the gospel of Jesus calls you to repent – to turn away from your old way

of life, and reorient your whole life around Jesus.

What does it mean to repent and believe the gospel? John Howard Yoder has said it well: “evangelical Protestantism, in its concern for helping every individual to make his own authentic choice in full awareness and sincerity, is in constant danger of confusing the kingdom itself with the benefits of the kingdom. If anyone repents, if anyone turns around to follow Jesus in his new way of life, this will do something for the aimlessness of his life. It will do something for his loneliness by giving him fellowship. It will do something for his anxiety and guilt by giving him a good conscience. So [those] whose ‘evangelism’ is to proclaim the offer of restored selfhood, liberation from anxiety and guilt, are not wrong. If anyone repents, it will do something for his intellectual confusion, by giving him doctrinal meat to digest, a heritage to appreciate, and a conscience about telling it all as it is:

So ‘evangelicalism’ with its concern for hallowed truth and reasoned communication is not wrong; it is right. If a man repents it will do something for his moral weakness by giving him the focus for wholesome self-discipline, it will keep him from immorality and get him to work on time. So [those] who promise that God cares about helping me squeeze through the tight spots of life are not wrong; they have their place. **BUT ALL THIS IS NOT THE GOSPEL.** This is just the bonus, the wrapping paper thrown in when you buy the meat, the ‘everything’ which will be added, without for it, if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” (quoted in Hauerwas, 46)

Tonight’s passage comes as a strong warning to us – because we are very much like the reformed church of Josiah! We tend to be proud of our reformation! We tend to think that we are the ones who do things the right way! But Jeremiah reminds us that so what if you have the best liturgy in the world?! Are you loving God? Are you doing what he has said? Are you loving others? Especially those who are weaker than you?

Remember, this is the word of the LORD to the people of God at their best. The Word of the LORD lays bare our pretensions and reminds us that left to ourselves, our best is pathetic! We need the gospel – the good news of what God has done in Jesus to change the world. Now, in chapter 6, we hear of the coming disaster from the north. I want to remind you that this is where we started. In chapter 1, we saw that Jeremiah is pre-eminently a theologian of the Word of the Lord. God had said to Jeremiah “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (1:9-10) And God showed Jeremiah two things in chapter 1:

- 1) an almond branch, signifying that the LORD is watching over his word to perform it – since the word “almond” sounds like the word for “watching”
- 2) a boiling pot facing away from the north – since the LORD is bringing disaster from the north against Jerusalem.

In our passage tonight we hear the phrase “thus saith the LORD” five times – along with a “declares the LORD” and a “says the LORD.” These markers help structure our

text There is a pretty simple chiasm in chapter 6. The passage opens and closes with “disaster” coming from the north against the daughter of Zion (v1-5 and 22-26). The Nations are called and Jerusalem is warned of the coming desolation (v6-8, 16-21). Bracketing the center of the passage is Jeremiah’s complaint that no one will listen to him and the LORD’s explanation of why they won’t listen (v9-10, v13-15), leaving the wrath of the LORD at the exact middle of the passage (v11-12) – which comes back around at the end of the passage as well (v27-30). Chapter 6 opens:

1. Disaster from the North Is Coming Against the Daughter of Zion (v1-5)

Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem! Usually, one would flee to Jerusalem in times of trouble. Jerusalem is the city that is most likely to withstand a siege! And especially because the presence of God is within Jerusalem. But now Jeremiah urges the people of Benjamin to run away – flee for safety – from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem, for disaster looms out of the north, and great destruction.

Back in chapter 4, we heard Jeremiah’s call to “blow the trumpet” and “flee for safety” (4:5-6). Disaster from the north – literally, “evil from the north” – is looming – destruction is coming. 2 The lovely and delicately bred I will destroy, the daughter of Zion.[a] 3 Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her; they shall pitch their tents around her; they shall pasture, each in his place.

Verses 4-5 take on the voice of the relentless attackers: 4 “Prepare war against her; arise, and let us attack at noon! Woe to us, for the day declines, for the shadows of evening lengthen! 5 Arise, and let us attack by night and destroy her palaces!” Not only do they attack at noon – in the midst of the day – but they wail because night is coming, and far from needing rest, they continue their attack by night. “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night” can stay these relentless marauders!

2. The Nations Called and Jerusalem Warned: Evil Is Coming Because of Your Evil (v6-8)

a. Nations Called to Besiege Jerusalem for Her Oppressions (v6-7)

6 For thus says the LORD of hosts: Verse six gives us our first “thus says the LORD” – the preposition “for” connects us back to what we have just heard. Here is the reason why this army is so relentless: “Cut down her trees; cast up a siege mound against Jerusalem. This is the city that must be punished; there is nothing but oppression within her. 7 As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps fresh her evil; violence and destruction are heard within her; sickness and wounds are ever before me.

The nations are called to besiege Jerusalem because Jerusalem is characterized by violence and destruction. “there is nothing but oppression within her.” Jeremiah is talking about a social system where the strong exploit the weak. How do you use power? Let me start with an easy example. The abusive husband uses his position as a weapon. He uses words to manipulate his wife for his own selfish benefit. That’s oppression. As a husband, as a father, do you use your authority for your own selfish benefit? Do you order your children around for your own convenience? That’s

oppression.

It can be difficult sometimes to recognize oppression. 5 We are all sinners – what is the difference between oppression and “ordinary sin” (and even that distinction should remind us that the difference between oppression and “ordinary sin” is simply that oppression is “ordinary sin” that is accepted as “ordinary”!) But you can see the result: “sickness and wounds are ever before me.” When our lives are characterized by repentance, then sin is not allowed to fester. But when repentance is absent, then sin grows into violence and oppression. And so the LORD warns Jerusalem herself:

b. Jerusalem Warned of the Coming Desolation (v8)

Notice that God has not yet turned away in disgust. He warns that he is about to turn away! But the warning comes so that Jerusalem will repent. When God’s people are characterized by oppression and violence, then God will make them a desolation – an uninhabited land. I cannot help but think that this has too often characterized the church. It’s too easy to point to other times in church history: the way that the church turned a blind eye to the plight of slaves in the Old South; but we need to deal with what the LORD is saying to us in our own day! Oppression and violence is often found in our homes. Too often abuse is cloaked in the mantle of “discipline” – and those who are abused are accused of not being “submissive.” The word of the LORD comes to us and says that if we tolerate this, God will turn away from his church “in disgust.” True reformation of the church will result not just in outwardly “pure worship” but will result in inward love for God and neighbor!

A couple weeks ago, I was visiting with some African-American friends of mine, talking about the recent troubles in Ferguson and New York City. You often hear people saying that one part of the solution is that we need more black cops. My friends laughed when they heard that. They agreed – that would be a good thing – 6 but none of their friends would dream of actually doing it. After all, if a black man becomes a policeman, he will be expected to use his knowledge of the black community against them. For a black man to become a cop, he must renounce his friends and family. How do you create the sort of community where that changes? That’s a huge question – but at the heart of the answer is love. We need to love our neighbor – and love includes listening – seeking to understand our neighbor – and not take advantage of him for our selfish benefit.

3. They Refuse to Listen to the Word of the LORD (v9-15)

a. Jeremiah: No One Will Listen to Me! (v9-10)

9 Thus says the LORD of hosts: “They shall glean thoroughly as a vine the remnant of Israel; like a grape gatherer pass your hand again over its branches.” In verse 9 we hear our second “thus says the LORD” – as Jeremiah moves from the image of the shepherds (v3) to that of the vineyard (v9). Not only are the invading armies like shepherds pasturing their flocks against Jerusalem, they are also gleaning the vine – stripping the branches of Jerusalem bare. Nothing will be left.

And as Jeremiah hears this, he asks: 10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, that

they may hear? Who will listen to the warning? Will you? The double “behold” of verse 10 points to its central role: Behold, their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen; behold, the word of the LORD is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it.

The word of the LORD is supposed to be a delight! The word of the LORD is supposed to be something you believe – something you rejoice to hear and to do! 7 When the people of God refuse to listen to the word of God – when they mock it – when they refuse to take pleasure in it – then there is no other alternative than verses 11-12:

b. Yahweh: Pour Out My Wrath on All the People (v11-12)

Judgment is coming. Walter Brueggemann points out that the order of “houses, fields, and wives” in verse 12 is the same order as the 10th commandment in Deuteronomy 5:21. You shall not covet the houses, fields, and wives of others. If you covet them, then your own houses, fields, and wives will be taken away.

So often, God had stretched out his hands in mercy – yearning for his people to return to him. But when they would not return – when they would not repent – then God says that he will stretch out his hands in judgment. It’s not popular these days to say this. Many Christians would deny that God is angry with humanity. Just like many Christians in Jeremiah’s day denied that God was angry with Jerusalem! God says that judgment is coming upon all Jerusalem – regardless of age – regardless of social situation – the children, the young men, the husband and wife, the elderly and the very aged. Why? The reason is given in verses 13-15:

c. Yahweh: They Have Said “Peace, Peace” When There Is No Peace (v13-15)

We saw last time that there was no one who does justice and seeks truth. The beginning of chapter 5 demonstrated that both the poor and the great did not know the way of the LORD, the justice of their God. We are reminded of this in verse 13. From the least to the greatest – everyone is greedy for unjust gain. In Hebrew it just says “everyone is greedy for gain” – so it’s not necessarily that everyone wants to be unjust – rather, it’s that everyone is greedy for gain, so they will overlook injustice for the sake of the bottom line. We see this in the stock market of today. We’re too busy to research our investments to see if their business practices match the standards of God’s word. So we just invest in companies that make good profits. We are greedy for gain – so we don’t care about justice.

How do you make a difference? Make one decision today that actively promotes justice. Psalm 15 says that the blessed man swears to his own hurt and keeps his word. But that’s the exact opposite of the prophets and priests of Jerusalem: The prophets and priests alike have sworn falsely. The prophets and the priests were those who were called to bring peace – the prophets through their preaching – the priests through their sacrifices and their blessings. Through the ministry of the prophets and priests, “shalom” would come to the people of God.

But the priests and the prophets had stopped paying attention to the word of the LORD: 14 They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when

there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,” says the LORD. When God does not say “peace” – when God does not give “shalom” – you should not give shalom!

The prophets and the priests should have called Jerusalem to repentance! The church should be calling abusers to repentance: those who use words abusively – and those who use their money and their power to control and manipulate others. Those who will not hear the Word of the LORD and repent “will fall among those who fall...they shall be overthrown, says the LORD.”

And so, starting in verse 16, we start back up the chiastic road we came down. Just as Jerusalem was warned in verse 8 – so now Jerusalem is called to listen to the sound of the trumpet:

2'. The Nations Summoned: Disaster Comes Because They Rejected My Law (v16-21)

b'. Jerusalem Warned to Listen to the Trumpet and Walk in the Ancient Paths (v16-17)

16 Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ The “ancient paths” are the “forever paths.” Ask for the ancient paths – the good way – that tried and true way that God has established forever.

In Jeremiah’s childhood, the priests had discovered a copy of the Law in the temple. It is likely that this refers to the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy frequently uses the language of the “way” – calling Israel to walk in the “way” of the LORD. Jeremiah now reminds Israel of this “ancient path.” Jeremiah does not view the “ancient paths” with nostalgia. He’s not talking about going back to do things the way they did in the ‘good ol’ days.’ He’s talking about doing things the way that they should have been done all along!

Today we are infatuated with whatever is new. If it is newer and faster and bigger – then we think that it is better. Newer and faster and bigger may well get you to your destination more quickly – but where are you going? and what is the price of getting there? But it’s equally dangerous to fall prey to nostalgia! Those of us who embrace the “historic” Christian faith are perhaps especially prone to this! We think that the solution is to go back to the way things were done in the ‘50s – whether the 1950s by those who are frustrated with postmodern society – or the 1850s by those who think of the Old South as the ideal society – or the 1750s by those who love Jonathan Edwards – or the 1650s by the neo-Puritans – or the 1550s by the ‘true Calvinists’ – or the 1250s by the Thomists – or the original 50s when the apostles themselves were alive!

The “ancient paths” does not refer to the actual ways that our fathers lived (after all, they failed pretty miserably just like we do!). Rather, the “ancient paths” refers to the

way that God has laid out that we should live. The ancient paths will draw on every age – and learn from every generation – because we see that every human being is made in the image of God, and so every human being has value and should be loved!

The ancient paths of Jeremiah 6:16 may well have been what Jesus had in mind when he said, “take my yoke upon you and learn from me... and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matt 11:28-30) God had told Jerusalem to walk in the good way – the ancient paths – but they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ We will choose our own path – and make our own way.

17 I set watchmen over you, saying, ‘Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!’ But they said, ‘We will not pay attention.’ And so, just as verses 6-7 spoke of what the nations would do to Jerusalem, now the nations are called as witness to Jerusalem’s apostasy:

a’. Nations Called as Witnesses Because Judah Rejected God’s Law (v18-21)

The Reformers would have said, But Jeremiah, you’re not being fair! We have reformed worship! Our worship services are in perfect accord with the Word of God! The voice of the LORD speaks to us over 2500 years:

20 What use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba, or sweet cane from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to me. So what if your worship is Reformed?! So what if your preaching is “gospel-centered”?! If your prophets and priests – if your preaching and worship – is all squeaky clean and proper “according to the scriptures” – but you do not do justice, then what’s the point? If you say that you love God, but you do not love those who are made in the image of God, then you do not love God!

21 Therefore thus says the LORD: ‘Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.’” Verse 21 says “therefore thus says the LORD” – the “therefore” shows us that verse 21 is something of a conclusion to this section. Because the people of God have refused to love one another (or, to use Jeremiah’s language – because they have not done justice or walked in the ancient paths of the LORD), therefore, the LORD says that he will cause them to stumble and perish. And just as the opening section of chapter 6 focused on the coming disaster from the north, so also the concluding section of chapter 6 focuses on the coming disaster from the north:

1’. A People Coming from the North Country Against the Daughter of Zion (v22-26)

We heard about the shepherds encamped against Jerusalem with their flocks (v3) 12 the siege mounds of v6 and the stripping of the vines in v9, the plunder of v11-12, and the stumbling blocks of v21. Now we hear of the mighty army – cruel and without mercy – set in array as a man for battle against the daughter of Zion. Remember that at the end of Jeremiah 4, we heard about the two women – the earthly Jerusalem who is a whore; and the daughter of Zion – crying out as a woman in labor, about to be murdered by her

enemies...

Verses 24-26 should be heard in the same light: 24 We have heard the report of it; our hands fall helpless; anguish has taken hold of us, pain as of a woman in labor. 25 Go not out into the field, nor walk on the road, for the enemy has a sword; terror is on every side. 26 O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes; make mourning as for an only son, most bitter lamentation, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us. A woman in labor... ..mourning as for an only son... Because while we need to hear the warning – and take the warning seriously! – as Peter tells us, “judgment begins with the household of God!” – we also need to see that this is why Jesus came! “Our hands fall helpless” “Terror is on every side.” “Suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.”

Remember that this is the judgment and verdict of God against his people. Only when an “only son” – the seed of the woman – comes to bear our iniquity and heal our diseases, only then will we escape the wrath to come! After all, when Jesus took the call of Isaiah into his own mouth 13 he took the call of all the prophets into his own mouth. Jesus is the true prophet:

Conclusion: The Prophet as Tester of Metals (v27-30)

In vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed. Something has to change. Somehow, God has to remove the wicked and purify his people. The problem is that when God judges his people by fire, the result is that no one is left standing. That’s why when Jesus came he said that he had a baptism to undergo – a baptism by fire. Our only hope for salvation is that someone could survive the refining by fire. And that is what Jesus has done! Jesus has endured the refining fire of God’s wrath – and he has emerged as pure silver.

TEXT: Jeremiah 7:1 – 8:3

TITLE: *WORSHIP GOD HATES*

BIG IDEA:

**4 FORMS OF IMPROPER WORSHIP EXPOSED AND CONDEMNED –
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES WITHOUT INWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS
(REFLECTED IN OUTWARD ACTIONS) CANNOT SAVE**

INTRODUCTION:

There have been some great Reformation preachers down thru the ages – men of God who had their pulse on the signs of the times and understood the precarious state of false security stemming from empty worship. Jeremiah was the John the Baptist of his day – preaching repentance from sin and a heartfelt return to covenant loyalty.

Jeremiah 7 begins the third message from the weeping prophet, which continues through chapter 10 with a similar theme = a call to repentance. This is the first of 2 Temple Sermons for the prophet.

Mackay: The religious establishment of the day pointed to the Temple, its worship and sacrifices, and the divine commitment to Jerusalem as guaranteeing the security of the city [in the midst of political turmoil] and the perpetuation of the Davidic dynasty. They argued that the Lord's favour had been bestowed absolutely and unconditionally, and they did not consider that there was any connection between it and the morality of the conduct of the people. Jeremiah was called upon to oppose this delusion that covenant blessing could be divorced from covenant obedience. True security can only be found in a right, living relationship with God.

**4 FORMS OF IMPROPER WORSHIP EXPOSED AND CONDEMNED –
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES WITHOUT INWARD RIGHTEOUSNESS
(REFLECTED IN OUTWARD ACTIONS) CANNOT SAVE**

(:1-2) PROLOGUE – INDICTMENT AGAINST IMPROPER WORSHIP

“The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ‘Stand in the gate of the LORD's house and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter by these gates to worship the LORD!’”

This chapter is all about **worship**; even the setting is at the gates of the temple in Jerusalem where God's Word comes to Jeremiah to proclaim it

Matthew Henry: It would affront the priests, and expose the prophet to their rage, to have such a message as this delivered within their precincts; but the prophet must not fear the face of man.

William Higgins: God tells him to stand in a place where everyone can hear him, as the crowds gather to worship in the temple. The phrase, “*all you men of Judah,*” may indicate that this took place during an annual festival, when all Judah was expected to come. It would have been a huge crowd.

I. (:3-15) RELIGIOUS FORMALISM – Superficial trust in religious places and practices

A. (:3-7) Reformation Required – Righteous Behavior, Not Empty Formalism, Provides True Security

1. (:3) Repentance Required = Off Track

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place.’”

2. (:4) What it Means to Trust in Deceptive Words = Self-Deception

*“Do not trust in **deceptive words**, saying, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’”*

Cf. “I go to church ... I go to church”

James Barker: They were trusting in the temple, but they were not trusting in God [hypocrisy and religious formalism]. Today people often talk about their church, but they know nothing about God, and nothing about the Bible.

Calvin: We hence see that external rites are here repudiated, when men seek in a false way to gain favor before God, and seek to redeem their sins by false compensations, while yet their hearts continue perverse. This truth might be enlarged upon, but as it often occurs in the prophets, I only notice it shortly. It is enough to regard the main point, — that while the Jews were satisfied with the Temple, the ceremonies and the sacrifices, they were self — deceivers, for their boasting was fallacious: “the words of falsehood” are to be taken as meaning that false and vain glorying in which the Jews indulged, while they sought to ward off God’s vengeance by external rites, and at the same time made no effort to return into favor by ameliorating their life.

Constable: The people were not to assume that just because they had the temple, the Lord would keep them safe. Many of the Judahites believed that the existence of the temple guaranteed Jerusalem’s inviolability. God’s supernatural deliverance of Jerusalem in Hezekiah’s reign probably accounts for some of this feeling (**2 Kings 18:13 to 2 Kings 19:37**). Furthermore, Josiah had glorified the temple during his reforms.

3. (:5-6) What it Means to Practice Social Justice = Despicable Deeds

*“For if you truly **amend your ways** and your deeds,
if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor,
if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow,
and do not shed innocent blood in this place,
nor walk after other gods to your own ruin,”*

Mackay: *Do justice* – This refers to the whole process of legal and civil administration in the land. Indeed it goes beyond that to cover all transactions and relationships “between a man and his neighbor.” They have all to be conducted in terms of the norms set out in the covenant.

4. (:7) Inheritance Inhabited

“then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.”

B. (:8-12) Ruin Lies Ahead for Wicked Hypocrisy

1. (:8-10) Wicked Hypocrisy

*“Behold, you are trusting in **deceptive words** to no avail. Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal, and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’-- that you may do all these abominations?”*

Calvin: He again teaches . . . that the glorying of the Jews was foolish, while they boasted of the Temple and of their sacrifices to God. He calls their boastings the words of **falsehood** . . . because they wholly turned to a contrary end what God had instituted. It was his will that sacrifices should be offered to him in the Temple — to what purpose? To preserve unity of faith among the whole people. And sacrifices, what was their design? To shew the people that they deserved eternal death, and also that they were to flee to God for mercy, there being no other expiation but the blood of Christ.

But there was no repentance, they were not sorry for their sins; nay, as we shall presently see, they took liberty to indulge more in them on account of their ceremonies, which yet ought to have been the means of leading them to repentance. They were then the words of falsehood when they separated the signs from their ends. The reality and the sign ought indeed to be distinguished the one from the other; but it is an intolerable divorce, when men lay hold on naked signs and overlook the reality. There was in the sacrifices the reality which I have now mentioned: they were reminded by the spectacle that they were worthy of eternal death; and then, they were to exercise penitence, and thus to flee to God’s mercy. As there was no account made of Christ, no care for repentance, no sorrow for sins, no fear of God, no humility, it was an impious separation of what ought to have been united.

Mackay: “One gets the distinct impression that the message these men were conveying was simply this: Yahweh is our God and come what may he will never allow us, who come here and worship in his temple, to be completely overcome” (**Overholt** 1970:17-18). Such confidence allied to rank rebellion is detestable in the sight of God.

2. (:11) Shocking Sacrilege

“Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,’ declares the LORD.”

Quoted by Jesus when He chased the moneychangers out of the temple (cf. **Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46**).

William Higgins: A den of robbers is a **place where criminals hide out** to avoid being caught, and then go forth to do more crimes. And this is what the temple has become. They sin in all kinds of ways and then come to the temple and say, ‘we’re safe!’ And then they go out and continue to sin.

Thompson: Yahweh’s people too are law-breakers, i.e., covenant-breakers. Their misdeeds merit divine judgment. They flee to the temple for protection, thinking to be safe there, believing that participation in the formal rituals of the cult would somehow deliver them from the Judge. But the temple was no sheltering place for covenant-breakers. There was no security there from the searching eyes of Yahweh.

3. (:12) Certain Ruin

“But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.”

Adam Clarke: See what I did to my tabernacle and ark formerly: after a long residence at Shiloh, for the iniquity of the priests and the people, I suffered it to fall into the hands of the Philistines, and to be carried captive into their land, and to be set up in the house of their idols. And because of your iniquities, I will deal with you and this temple in the same way; for as I spared not Shiloh, though my ark was there, but made it a victim of my wrath, so will I do to Jerusalem and her temple.

Ryken: The archaeological evidence shows that Shiloh was destroyed twice over – once by the Philistines and once when the Assyrians carried the northern tribes into captivity. When Jeremiah told the people to go to Shiloh he was telling them to go to the place where **God is not**.

C. (:13-15) Rejection for Persistent Rebellion

1. (:13) Ignoring Correction

“‘And now, because you have done all these things,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you did not hear, and I called you but you did not answer,’”

2. (:14) Inviting Disaster

“therefore, I will do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave you and your fathers, as I did to Shiloh.”

3. (:15) Inheriting Rejection

“And I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, all the offspring of Ephraim.”

MacArthur: Ephraim represents the northern kingdom of Israel, since it was the leading tribe (cf. **2 Ki 17:23**). As God exiled them to Assyria (ca. 722 B.C.), though they were more in number and power, so He will do to the southern kingdom.

II. (:16-20) SHAMEFUL IDOLATRY

A. (:16) Ongoing Intercession Forbidden

“As for you, do not pray for this people, and do not lift up cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with Me; for I do not hear you.”

B. (:17-19) Offerings to Other Gods Prove Shameful

“Do you not see what they are doing in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out libations to other gods in order to spite Me. ‘Do they spite Me?’ declares the LORD. ‘Is it not themselves they spite, to their own shame?’”

MacArthur: **queen of heaven** – (cf. **44:17-19; 25**). The Jews were worshiping Ishtar, an Assyrian and Babylonian goddess also called Ashtoreth and Astarte, the wife of Baal or Molech. Because these deities symbolized generative power, their worship involved prostitution.

C. (:20) Outpouring of Consuming Wrath Unleashed

“Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and on beast and on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground; and it will burn and not be quenched.’”

III. (:21-28) MAN-MDE WORSHIP

A. (:21-22) You Are Approaching God the Wrong Way

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat flesh. For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.’”

Matthew Henry: God, having shown the people that the temple would not protect them while they polluted it with their wickedness, here shows them that their sacrifices would not atone for them, nor be accepted, while they went on in disobedience.

B. (:23-24) You Are Not Approaching God the Right Way

1. (:23) Divine Command

“But this is what I commanded them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the way which I command you, that it may be well with you.’”

2. (:24) Human Counsel

“Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward.”

C. (:25-26) You Have Failed to Respond to Correction

1. (:25) Repeated Warnings

“Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them.”

2. (:26) Stubborn Rebellion

“Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers.”

D. (:27-28) You Will Be Cut Off From Truth

1. (:27) Deaf and Dumb Towards God’s Word of Truth

“And you shall speak all these words to them, but they will not listen to you; and you shall call to them, but they will not answer you.”

2. (:28) Cut Off From God’s Truth

“And you shall say to them, ‘This is the nation that did not obey the voice of the LORD their God or accept correction; truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth.’”

IV. (:29-34) DETESTABLE CHILD SACRIFICE

A. (:29-31) Shameful Sacrifices

1. (:29) Unrelenting Judgment = Time for Lamenting

“Cut off your hair and cast it away, And take up a lamentation on the bare heights; For the LORD has rejected and forsaken The generation of His wrath.”

Thompson: In Jeremiah’s view, Israel, now represented only by Judah and Jerusalem, had abandoned her consecration to Yahweh and was not worthy to wear the crown of her long hair. That the lamentation was to be made on the bare heights where so many of Israel’s evils had been committed (2:20; 3:2, 21; etc.) was appropriate.

2. (:30-31) Unimaginable Abominations = Detestable Worship Practices

“For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,’ declares the LORD, ‘they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.’”

Constable: The people had also built a shrine at a site called "Topheth," in the Valley of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem. The name "Topheth" may come from the Aramaic *tephath*, meaning "fireplace," "oven," or "hearth." The Hebrews made a play

on its name by adding the vowels of *bosheth*, "shame," a name for Baal, to this word. Hinnom may have been a former owner of the valley. The idol worshipped there was Molech, a fire god. The Israelites had offered their children as human sacrifices at this shrine during the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh (**2 Kings 16:3; 2 Kings 21:6**), something that Yahweh neither commanded nor even entertained in His thinking (cf. **Leviticus 18:21; Leviticus 20:2-5; 2 Kings 23:10; Micah 6:7**). King Josiah had attempted to wipe out this horrible practice (**2 Kings 23:10**), but the people revived it after he died in 609 B.C.

B. (:32-34) Slaughter House

1. (:32) The Valley of the Slaughter

“Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place.”

2. (:33) Human Road Kill

“And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away.”

Constable: This future mass grave would become a feeding ground for birds and beasts. No one would frighten the animals away because the Israelites who remained alive would be taken away as captives (cf. **Deuteronomy 28:26**).

Feinberg: So complete will the desolation of the land be that no one will be there to drive the birds of prey from the carcasses (v. 33). The ancients dreaded being left unburied after death (**Deut 28:26; Isa 18:6**). The highest indignity for the dead was to leave the body unburied.

3. (:34) No More Joy and Gladness

“Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin.”

(:1-3) EPILOGUE: DESTINY OF HUMILIATING DEATH

A. (:1) Dead Bones Exposed

*“At that time,” declares the LORD,
“they will bring out the bones of the **kings** of Judah,
and the bones of its **princes**,
and the bones of the **priests**,
and the bones of the **prophets**,
and the bones of the **inhabitants of Jerusalem** from their graves.”*

Mackay: The Assyrians certainly, and the Babylonians probably, behaved in the way described here against vassals whom they considered had broken their covenant

engagements with them. The exposure of the bones of the dead was considered to be extreme humiliation (2 Sam. 21:12-14; Ps. 53:5; Isa. 14:18-19; Ezek. 6:5; for violating the dead, cf. Amos 2:1). It was the ultimate insult, an act of supreme contempt against a people who were so weak that they could not even protect the remains of their ancestors.

B. (:2) Dead Bones as Excrement

*“And they will spread them out to the sun, the moon, and to all the host of heaven, which they have **loved**, and which they have **served**, and which they have **gone after**, and which they have **sought**, and which they have **worshiped**. They will not be gathered or buried; they will be as dung on the face of the ground.”*

Mackay: Evidence of astral worship is found throughout this period (2 Kgs. 21:3, 5; 23:4; Zeph. 1:5; Ezek. 8:16). But these gods are impotent and unable to provide assistance when the bones of their former devotees are spread out before them in a macabre reconstruction of the worship they once engaged in.

C. (:3) Death Chosen Instead of Life

“And death will be chosen rather than life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family, that remains in all the places to which I have driven them,’ declares the LORD of hosts.”

Feinberg: In spite of the violation heaped on their dead compatriots, the survivors will prefer death to life (v.3) because of the many trials they are yet to suffer at the hands of their captors.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What % of worshippers in “Christian” churches on Sunday are truly regenerate?
- 2) What type of “*deceptive words*” do religious folks listen to today?
- 3) Why do people imagine that they can offer worship to God while violating His commands on how to live?
- 4) What historical examples of ruin and destruction as a result of God’s judgment would you point to?

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Calvin: We ought to take particular notice of this passage; for the majority of men at this day set up their own fictions against God's word. The Papists indeed pretend antiquity; they say that they have been taught by their ancestors; and at the same time they plead councils and the ordinances of the fathers: but yet there is not one of them, who is not addicted to his own figments, and who does not take the liberty, nay, an unbridled license, to reject whatever he pleases. Moreover, if the origin of the whole Papal worship be considered, it will appear, that those who first devised so many strange superstitions, were only impelled by audacity and presumption, in order that they might trample underfoot the word of God. Hence it is, that all things are become corrupt; for they brought in all the strange figments of their own brains. And we see that the Papists at this day are so perversely fixed in their own errors, that they prefer themselves and their own trumperies to God. And the same is the case also with all heretics. What then is to be done? Obedience, as I have said, is to be held as the basis of all true religion. If, then, on the other hand, we wish to render our worship approved by God, let us learn to cast aside whatever is our own, so that his authority may prevail over all our reasons.

Matthew Henry:

- I. He shows them the invalidity of the plea they so much relied on, that they had the temple of God among them and constantly attended the service of it, and endeavours to take them off from their confidence in their external privileges and performances, **Jeremiah 7:1-11**.
- II. He reminds them of the desolations of Shiloh, and foretels that such should be the desolations of Jerusalem, **Jeremiah 7:12-16**.
- III. He represents to the prophet their abominable idolatries, for which he was thus incensed against them, **Jeremiah 7:17-20**.
- IV. He sets before the people that fundamental maxim of religion that "*to obey is better than sacrifice*" (**1 Samuel 15:22**), and that God would not accept the sacrifices of those that obstinately persisted in disobedience, **Jeremiah 7:21-28**.
- V. He threatens to lay the land utterly waste for their idolatry and impiety, and to multiply their slain as they had multiplied their sin, **Jeremiah 7:29-34**.

Francis Schaeffer: Today's Idols = Personal Peace and Affluence

Personal peace means just to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, whether across the world or across the city—to live one's life with minimal possibilities of being personally disturbed. Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren.

Affluence means an overwhelming and ever-increasing prosperity—a life made up of

things, things, and more things—a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.

William Higgins: What are your false securities?

- You may say, “I go to church, I must be fine.” The Judeans went to temple services. They thought they were fine. They weren’t. They were judged.
- You may say, “I believe in God.” James tells us “demons believe” (1:19) but it does them no good, because “*faith without works is dead*” (1:17). Such is defective faith and can’t save.
- You may say, “I’ve been baptized.” **1 Corinthians 10:1-5** tells that the Israelites were baptized in the Red Sea. “*Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness*” They did not receive the promises.
- You may say, “I’ve had an encounter with God.” **1 Corinthians 10:1-5** tells us that the ancient Israelites had many experiences with God, but they were judged and did not enter into the blessings of God.
- You may say, “I have Christian parents, I’ll be fine.” **Ezekiel 18:10-13** teaches us that the child of a righteous parent who chooses to live in sin “shall not live. He has done all these abominations; he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him.” For the soul that sins, dies, whether it is the parent or the child.
- You may say, “I used to walk with God, he won’t judge me.” **Ezekiel 18:24** says, “*But when a righteous person turns away from his righteousness and does injustice and does the same abominations that the wicked person does, shall he live? None of the righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered; for the treachery of which he is guilty and the sin he has committed, for them he shall die.*”

Don’t trust in any of these deceptive words. Nothing can take the place of a right relationship with God; a relationship of faith and obedience.

Thompson: When the man of Israel came to worship Yahweh, he acknowledged on the one hand Yahweh’s high status and his complete and sole sovereignty over the worshipper’s life, and at the same time he recognized his own dependent status and the need for personal submission to his sovereign Lord, Yahweh. Worship thus involved him in the willing acknowledgment of Yahweh’s Lordship and the glad acceptance of his covenant demands.

Peter Wallace: The Temple Message – Remember Shiloh

Wouldn’t you like to know how the people of Jerusalem responded to Jeremiah? Jeremiah 7 tells us that this is a sermon that Jeremiah preached at the temple. It is likely that this is the sermon referred to in Jeremiah chapter 26. In Jeremiah 26 we are told

that Jeremiah preached at the temple, but we are not told the exact words of the sermon – we only hear the summary: “I will make this house like Shiloh.” (26:6) In other words, Jeremiah 7 sure sounds like the sermon referred to in Jeremiah 26!

In Jeremiah 26 we are simply told that when Jeremiah preached this message the priests, the prophets, and the people laid hold of him and dragged him to the officials demanding his death. But there were at least a few faithful elders who refused to put Jeremiah to death. Chapters 2-6 filled our ears with turbulent woe. Jeremiah reminds Judah of the story of the northern Kingdom. Israel refused to repent – and was destroyed. Judah, on the other hand, pretended to repent – and while “fake repentance” can buy you some time, it only makes it worse in the end.

Faithless Israel is more righteous than treacherous Judah. Because at least Israel was honest! Jerusalem claimed to love the LORD – even as she betrayed him behind his back. Which is worse: a wife who says, “I hate you” – and goes and commits adultery, or a wife who says, “I love you” – and still goes and commits adultery? And yet God says that if you repent, if you return to the LORD, then he will be merciful.

Chapters 4-6 then proclaimed the coming disaster – the disaster from the north. As we saw, this message was proclaimed “in the days of King Josiah” – the best king Jerusalem ever had. All of Josiah’s reforms – all of Jerusalem’s corporate repentance – was only half-hearted. Israel at his best failed to do and to be all that God called Israel to do and to be. The message of Jeremiah is that destruction is coming – and there is nothing you can do to stop it! The temple sermon, in Jeremiah 7, declares that God will do to Jerusalem what he did to Shiloh.

1. “You Trust in Deceptive Words” (7:1-15)

Introduction: “Stand in the Gate of the LORD’s House” (7:1-2)

Jeremiah is standing at the gate of the temple – this is the place where he will be able to address the largest group of people – and (since he has a large stone wall behind him) the place with the best acoustics for being heard! It is also the center of the problem that he has come to address. When you come to the liturgy of the temple in Jerusalem, when you put your trust in the words of the priests, you are trusting lies. You will see in your bulletins that there is a chiasmic structure to Jeremiah’s message in v1-15. Jeremiah’s temple message has two points:

- 1) You are trusting deceptive words.
- 2) Truth has perished.

In the outline you will see that these two points are at the center of the two chiasms. In the first chiasm, Jeremiah sets out his basic point right up front:

a. “The Temple of the LORD” Is Not Why I Let You Dwell in This Place (v3-4)

Words are not enough. You must amend your ways and your deeds. As we saw in chapter 3, Jerusalem’s repentance has only been half-hearted. If you say that you are sorry, but you keep doing wickedness – that is not enough. Repentance is not just a matter of words, but of deeds. That’s the main point. But there is a subordinate point that Jerusalem needs to hear: Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple

of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ This is where Jeremiah gets radical.

The people of Israel had often repented. They had cried out to the LORD, and the LORD saved them from their enemies. Indeed, Solomon had prayed at the dedication of the temple, “When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they turn again to you and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers.” (1 Kings 8:32-34)

Solomon had told them to pray in this house. The glory of the LORD had filled this house. Israel’s failures and shortcomings were covered in this house! But God says that the “temple of the LORD” is not why I will let you dwell in the land. The rest of the chiasm expounds this central point.

b. If You Do Justice – Then I Will Let You Dwell in the Land (v5-7)

This is a dramatic challenge to Jerusalem and Judah. The warning is very clear: if you do not change, then you may not live here. We usually think of idolatry as the central problem. But here Jeremiah starts with the problem of justice. Execute justice – which means: Do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, the widow. Do not shed innocent blood – do not go after other gods. What does “doing justice” mean for us? It means that when the immigrant comes to the county building office confused about what office to go to about some matter, you help him find the right office. It means that you have fair and clear laws – fairly and honestly executed.

Let me give you an example. Let’s say that you’re a police officer. You pull over the son of the police chief for going 50 MPH down Main Street, Five minutes later you pull over the son of an illegal immigrant for going 45 MPH What happens? If you ticket the son of the illegal immigrant, but not the police chief’s son – that is oppression. I know a small town judge not far from here who became famous for his even-handed approach to justice. He became hated by the rich and powerful because he wouldn’t let their kids off! Police officers quickly learned that if they wanted a ticket to stick – send it to Judge H’s court. He wasn’t mean about it. He simply understood that doing justice requires equity. Not “same-ness” – but fairness. If you live in a community where the rich and powerful get special treatment, that is an oppressive community.

Justice does not mean forcing the rich to give their money to the poor. Justice means that the rich and powerful use their wealth and power in order to help the poor. When I look at human history, it is very rare to see a society that does this. But one thing is clear from Jesus’ teaching about the kingdom of God: the church is supposed to be a society that practices this. [Newton on a penny for the poor for every penny spent on conveniences] Just out of curiosity: did you notice the seeming contradiction in verse 7? 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. If God gave it to their fathers forever – then why is God threatening to drive them out of it?

On the one hand, yes, God promised the land to Abraham and his descendents forever. But that does not mean that any particular descendent of Abraham has a right to live in the land. This is the point that Paul will make in Romans 4. The promise was not made to Abraham's genetics. The promise was made to Abraham's faith. Without the faith of Abraham you may not receive the inheritance of Abraham. And if you have the faith of Abraham, you will also share the obedience of Abraham. God will be faithful to his promises – and his salvation is always by grace – but that does not mean that you can ignore his commands!

As Christopher Wright puts it, "Obedience was never the means of earning the land. But it was the condition in which the grace-gift could be possessed and enjoyed.... Obedience is the only way to enjoy the blessing of God's promise." (p110) As the old hymn says, "Trust and Obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

Verse 8 is the hinge and centerpiece of our first chiasm:

c. But You Trust in Deceptive Words to No Avail (v8)

But the temple of the Lord cannot save them! What lies do you believe? What deceptive words do you trust? Well, let me ask you this: what sins do you regularly confess every Sunday? That's what Jeremiah focuses on in verses 9-11

b'. You Do Abominations – and Then Think the Temple Will Save You! (v9-11)

Jeremiah's point here is that the people of God are using the temple as a means of not really dealing with sin. In the words of Walter Bruggemann: "The governing paradigm for the tradition of Jeremiah is Israel's covenant with Yahweh, rooted in the memories and mandates of the Sinai tradition. That covenant taught that the sovereign God of Israel required obedience to covenant stipulations about social practice and power. Disobedience to those covenant stipulations would result in heavy sanctions (curses) that would be experienced as death or displacement...." (Brueggemann, 3)

But in Jeremiah's day, this covenant theology had developed a sort of Davidic exceptionalism. The Jerusalem establishment claimed that "the God of Israel had made irrevocable promises to the temple and the monarchy, had taken up permanent residence in Jerusalem, and was for all time a patron and guarantor of the Jerusalem establishment." Their idea was that so long as we all "go to church" and say "sorry," we can live however we want! How often do we do the same thing? You hear the declaration of pardon every week: "Believer in Jesus Christ, you are free from the guilt and the power of sin!" If you respond to that by saying, "Woo hoo! We are delivered – now I can go back and sin again this week!" – then you are missing the point of the temple! "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:1-4)

Jeremiah has strong words for this: 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. A den of robbers is a safe place for robbers. Robbers will go out and steal – and then run back to their den – their hideout – for protection. Here God asks, is my temple a robbers den to you?! Is this house – which is called by my name – a safe place for those who reject my law? Jesus quotes this verse when he drives out the money-changers. I think that sometimes we only focus on the fact that they were money-changers. But the idea of a “den of robbers” is not just about robbing. It is the idea that this is a safe place for those who practice injustice. The temple should not be a safe place for robbers. The church should never be a “safe place” for those who want to go out and harm others. And so God calls Jerusalem to remember what he did in Shiloh (v12)

a’. Go to Shiloh and See What I Did to Israel – That’s What I Will Do Now (v12-15)

The tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh. The ark of the covenant had dwelt there – until the days of Eli, when it was captured by the Philistines – 7 when the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, died in the battle – and then, when he heard the news that the ark of God had been captured, Eli fell over and died – and then his daughter-in-law died in childbirth, and as she lay dying, she named the boy “Ichabod” (no-glory) because the glory had departed from Israel. We sang about this in Psalm 78 – and as we sang Psalm 78, you might have come away thinking, “now that God has raised up David, Shiloh will never happen again!”

Certainly the crowd that was listening to the sermon in Jeremiah 26 – the crowd that seized Jeremiah and demanded his death – they thought that Shiloh would never happen again! Jesus – and Stephen, and Paul – would all get in trouble for challenging the temple leadership. By the way, do you know where Jeremiah was from? Anathoth – the home of Abiathar, who was from the dispossessed line of priests after Eli, the sons of Ichabod. Was Jeremiah one of the descendents of Ichabod? We don’t know. But certainly he remembered the story of Ichabod – no glory – and he warns the priests in Jerusalem that the same story is about to be repeated. Think about that for a moment: God appears to have called a descendent of Eli – a son of Ichabod – as the last prophet of the Kingdom, who would warn the priestly line of Zadok that their time had come. It would be like God using the descendent of King Saul to rebuke the house of David! Oh, wait, he did, with Mordecai – and the book of Esther!

Our second point can be briefer – because it so obviously follows from the first! If the people of God are trusting in deceptive words, then it follows that “truth has perished.” And so the LORD says to Jeremiah:

2. “Truth Has Perished” (7:16-8:3)

Introduction: “Do Not Pray for This People” (v16)

The “you” is singular. Jeremiah, do not pray for this people... for I will not hear you. 8 In the first point, God started by telling Jeremiah to preach to the people. But here in the

second point, God starts by telling Jeremiah not to pray for them. The apostle John tells us not to pray for the one who has sinned “the sin unto death.” Do not pray for those whom God has condemned to destruction. I have often struggled with explaining this – but Jeremiah helped me tremendously. What prayer will God not hear?

In Jeremiah 7 (like in 1 John 5) the prayer that God will not hear is the prayer of intercession: “please forgive them.” If you pray “please forgive them” – but they refuse to repent – then God will not hear your prayer! This is why Jesus’ prayer, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” is so important! Jesus is the one man who can intercede with the Father in such a way as to forgive our sins – as well as change us so that we become repentant! But in Jeremiah’s day, it’s still getting worse:

a. The “Queen of Heaven” and the Idolatry of Jerusalem (v17-19)

Verses 18-19 describe the particular idolatries of Jerusalem – but the LORD also says that they are simply provoking themselves to their own shame. Notice that the whole family is involved in this idolatry. The children gather wood, the fathers kindle fire, and the women knead dough. Our idolatry today focuses around materialism and consumerism. [Wright, 115] Marketers know that if they target children, if they can lure them into a world of material pleasure, then they will own the next generation.

Deuteronomy 6 had spoken of how the family is supposed to be oriented around the word and works of God – speak of these things when you rise up and when you lie down. But too often we are oriented around games, sports, movies, music – our own pleasures and interests, rather than the words and works of God. What is it that you do together as a family? What is it that you worship together as a family? After all, judgment is coming:

b. “My Anger and My Wrath Will be Poured Out on This Place” (v20)

And when judgment comes, it will not only affect the people, it will affect all of creation. When Adam and Eve sinned, God said, “Cursed is the ground because of you.” God created humanity to govern and care for the created order. Therefore, when man sinned, the creation was subjected to futility. And in the same way, Israel was called to be the second Adam – to succeed where Adam failed – and likewise, Israel’s failure results in God’s curse on creation. The trees of the field and the fruit of the ground will also be scorched. God’s wrath will be poured out on this place – both upon man and upon beast. The creation groans.

All natural disasters are a result of human sin. Every time you hear of a flood, an earthquake, or a tornado you should remember that God’s judgment is against sin! Verses 21-23 add a curious statement:

c. I Did Not Command Burnt Offerings but Obedience (v21-23)

This has caused much consternation over the centuries. After all, in Exodus, Moses insisted on taking flocks and herds out of Egypt so that Israel could offer sacrifices to the LORD. And in Exodus 20, the very first thing that God says to Moses after giving the 10 Commandments, is the law of the altar – how to construct an altar for burnt

offerings and sacrifices!

There should be no controversy here. Jeremiah's point is very clear: Jerusalem has become obsessed with the minor details of the law. Burnt offerings and sacrifices are minor details. The big point of the Law is "Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you." (7:23)

In other words, the sacrificial system is not the main point. Jesus will say the same thing: Love God – and love neighbor – "on these two commands depend all the Law and the Prophets" If you succeed at keeping all the minutiae of Presbyterian church order, but you fail to love God and neighbor, then you have missed the whole point of Presbyterian church order.

d. But They Did Not Listen to Me (v24-26)

Verses 24-26 then summarize several hundred years of prophetic preaching. Ever since they came out of Egypt I have sent my prophets to call them back. But they refused to repent. And they will not listen to you, either:

d'. And They Will Not Listen to You – Truth Has Perished (v27-28)

That's why the LORD says to Jeremiah: "Truth has perished." They have believed lies – and so truth has perished. If you do not accept the discipline of the LORD, then you will lose the truth. We see that in the mainline churches – and increasingly in evangelicalism as well! If you will not listen to God – then truth simply becomes a matter of personal preference. Truth has perished. When Jeremiah hears this, he cannot help but utter a brief lament:

Interlude: a Lament for "the Generation of His Wrath" (v29)

"The generation of his wrath"! What a phrase! In times past, Lord, you showed favor! But now you have abandoned your heritage. Jeremiah has been instructed not to pray for this people – but he can still lament over them! Notice, however, that this lament is not addressed to his own generation. Jeremiah calls his readers – he calls us – to lament over "the generation of his wrath."

The lament is one of the lost arts of the modern world. We have barely retained the art of confession – where we confess that we are not as we should be. But we have lost the art of lamentation – where we lament that the world is not as it should be – our fathers were not as they should be. Sure, we can grumble about it! Just read Facebook! But a godly lament requires us to bring our sorrows to God!

c'. They Have Done Detestable Things Which I Did Not Command (v30-31)

Verses 30-31 then shows how far the people of God have fallen: they have defiled "the house that is called by my name" with their detestable things – and they have burnt their sons and daughters in the fire to Topheth. Notice the parallel "I did not command" with verse 22.

First (verse 22) the sons of Judah mistook sacrifice as the point of serving God. And so second (verse 31) they corrupted the idea of burnt offering to the point that they burned their sons and daughters in the fire. If sacrifice is the point – then why not offer the thing that is most dear to you? This is why Jeremiah says that sacrifice and offering is not the point! The point is obedience! When you lose sight of love of God and neighbor, the result is that you will destroy your children. The obvious example in our culture is abortion.

We allow people to kill their children for their own convenience. They are sacrificed on the altar of pleasure. Truth has perished. But Jeremiah says that what God desires is obedience to what he has said in his Word. And Jeremiah warns that God's patience will not continue forever:

b'. "The Valley of Slaughter" – the Land Shall Become a Waste (v32-34)

God promises that the days are coming when the Valley of the Son of Hinnom will be called the Valley of Slaughter. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom will eventually be known as "Gehenna" – a synonym for "hell." The land shall become a waste – as God's judgment comes upon Jerusalem. You can see in verses 32-34 the beginning of the picture of the final judgment that John will describe in Revelation 19-20. "The dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the beasts of the earth... and I will silence...the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness..."

a'. The Bones of Jerusalem Shall Be Spread Before the Hosts of Heaven Whom They Worshiped (8:1-3)

We have often heard Jeremiah use the language of kings, officials, prophets, priests, and people. The result of Jerusalem's sin is that the bones of the kings of Judah, the bones of its officials, the bones of the priests, the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem – "shall be spread before the sun and the moon and all the host of heaven..." and the remnant of "this evil family" would be scattered all over the earth. Dead bodies are unclean. To have your bones spread "as dung on the surface of the ground" is a horrendous fate.

Jeremiah's temple sermon was famous. It was preached at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (ca. 608 BC). It is quite likely that there was a fourteen year old boy present – also a son of the priests – but in his case, a son of the Jerusalem priests. And as he listened to Jeremiah proclaim the coming day of the LORD, the vision of the bones of God's people strewn across the valley, was impressed upon his mind and heart.

Twenty-two years later, that same boy, now living in exile in Babylon, heard the news that Jerusalem had fallen. "The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord GOD, you know.'" (Ezekiel 37:1-3)

Ezekiel probably listened to Jeremiah deliver that sermon. Or at the very least, he sat

riveted that night when his father described it! Jerusalem was a small town. The priesthood was a small and powerful group. The preaching of Jeremiah powerfully influenced Ezekiel. Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is the answer to Jeremiah's temple sermon. Jeremiah's sermon has no happy ending. Jeremiah's sermon ends: "Death shall be preferred to life by all the remnant that remains of this evil family in all the places where I have driven them, declares the LORD of hosts."

Perhaps that was the point in the sermon where the priests and prophets had Jeremiah arrested! When God declares that he will cast Jerusalem out of his sight – just like he did to Shiloh – "That was the unthinkable conclusion to an intolerable sermon." (Wright, 113) But then again, sometimes the sermon needs to end by saying, "If you don't repent, then you will die."

TEXT: Jeremiah 8:4-22

TITLE: WHY NOT REPENT?

BIG IDEA:

3 EXPLANATIONS OF ISRAEL'S REFUSAL TO REPENT DESPITE PROPHETIC WARNINGS

INTRODUCTION:

How can one explain the refusal of God's people to repent and turn back to faithful obedience once confronted with their rebellion? It seems like common sense on the surface of things. Why would people continue to spiral downwards on a course that leads to shame and destruction? And yet our sinfulness drives us down that incomprehensible road to hopelessness. Apart from God's grace and the intervention of our Savior, we continue to make unwise decisions that feed our greed and desire for independence. At some point, God's patience and forbearance expire so that we reach a point of irreversible rejection and destruction. That is why there is such urgency to repent while opportunity remains.

3 EXPLANATIONS OF ISRAEL'S REFUSAL TO REPENT DESPITE PROPHETIC WARNINGS

Themes of sin, judgment and mourning dominate chapters 8-9

I. (:4-7) CHARACTERIZATION OF AMAZING ARROGANCE – THEIR REFUSAL TO REPENT WAS IRRATIONAL

A. (:4-5) Stubborn

“And you shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away and not repent? Why then has this people, Jerusalem, Turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return.’”

Thompson: People in life learn from their mistakes. It would seem to be a built-in, intuitive response in many situations.

B. (:6) Headstrong (compared to war horses)

“I have listened and heard, They have spoken what is not right; No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his course, Like a horse charging into the battle.”

Mackay: the impossibility of restraining horses once they have started to charge into battle. Oblivious to the dangers around them, they sweep headlong in deliberate and vigorous action which is unstoppable. . . There is no way they are going to be turned back.

Parunak: They do not speak correctly, acknowledging their error. They may mourn over the suffering that they experience, but they will not go so far as to question their own conduct.

C. (:7) Oblivious (contrasted with migratory birds)

“Even the stork in the sky Knows her seasons; And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush Observe the time of their migration; But My people do not know The ordinance of the LORD.”

Mackay: This section (:4-7) makes use of three commonsense observations (about the actions of people, vv. 4-5; horses, v. 6; migratory birds, v. 7) to bring out how unnaturally Judah was responding to its circumstances. The note of amazement at how perverse their conduct was is reminiscent of 2:10-11.

Wiersbe: God gave the birds the instinct to know the seasons and the times of their migrations, but He gave people so much more: a spirit within to hear God’s voice and understand His Law. Made in the image of God, men and women ought to be as obedient to divine instruction as birds are to natural instinct.

II. (:8-12) CATALOGUE OF PERVASIVE WICKEDNESS – THEIR REFUSAL TO REPENT WAS IGNORANT AND SELF-SERVING

A. (:8-9) Devoid of Wisdom and Dismayed

“How can you say, ‘We are wise, And the law of the LORD is with us’? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes Has made it into a lie. The wise men are put to shame, They are dismayed and caught; Behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD, And what kind of wisdom do they have?”

Feinberg: In spite of her willful ignorance of the law of God, the nation boasts of her wisdom. The chief offenders were the priests and false prophets. Apparently they thought that having the law meant they had all the wisdom they needed. Denying God’s word by their deeds, they still boasted of its presence with them (cf. **Rom 2:17-23**).

Brian Bell: Possessing the scriptures is not the same as **Practicing** them!

B. (:10) Deceitful and Greedy

“Therefore I will give their wives to others, Their fields to new owners; Because from the least even to the greatest Everyone is greedy for gain; From the prophet even to the priest Everyone practices deceit.”

C. (:11) Deceived and Disingenuous

“And they heal the brokenness of the daughter of My people superficially, Saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ But there is no peace.”

D. (:12) Defiant and Destroyed

“Were they ashamed because of the abomination they had done? They certainly were not ashamed, And they did not know how to blush; Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time of their punishment they shall be brought down,’ Declares the LORD.”

Byron Chesney:

They were so in love with their sins and abominations that they were no longer ashamed of them. They relished in them. They no longer had the ability to blush over their sins because they had no shame.

III. (:13-17) CATASTROPHE OF DIVINE JUDGMENT – THEIR REFUSAL TO REPENT WAS IRREVERSIBLE

A. (:13) Prosperity Reversed – Instead Bondage

“I will surely snatch them away,’ declares the LORD; ‘There will be no grapes on the vine, And no figs on the fig tree, And the leaf shall wither; And what I have given them shall pass away.’”

B. (:14) Poison Awaits

“Why are we sitting still? Assemble yourselves, and let us go into the fortified cities, And let us perish there, Because the LORD our God has doomed us And given us poisoned water to drink, For we have sinned against the LORD.”

C. (:15) Peace Renounced – Instead Terror

“We waited for peace, but no good came; For a time of healing, but behold, terror!”

D. (:16-17) Plundering Dispatched

1. (:16) Image of Ravaging War Horses

“From Dan is heard the snorting of his horses; At the sound of the neighing of his stallions The whole land quakes; For they come and devour the land and its fulness, The city and its inhabitants.”

2. (:17) Image of Poisonous Serpents

“For behold, I am sending serpents against you, Adders, for which there is no charm, And they will bite you,’ declares the LORD.”

(:18-22) EPILOG -- CRIES OF HOPELESS BROKENNESS

A. (:18) Broken Heart

“My sorrow is beyond healing, My heart is faint within me!”

B. (:19-20) Alternating Cries

1. People Oppressed in Bondage

“Behold, listen! The cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land:”

Wiersbe: These verses (:13-22) blend three voices: God’s voice of judgment, the people’s voice of despair, and the prophet’s voice of anguish as he contemplated the ruin of a once-great nation.

2. Jerusalem Abandoned by God
“Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not within her?”
3. God Provoked by Idolatry
“Why have they provoked Me with their graven images, with foreign idols?”
4. Deliverance Prolonged Beyond Expectation
“Harvest is past, summer is ended, And we are not saved.”

Thompson: Jeremiah pictured the people of Judah as having passed by one opportunity after another to repent of their rebellious ways and so be delivered or saved from coming judgment. . . the brief poignant cry of the people gathers up two facts – the sense of being forsaken by Yahweh and the awareness that all hope of deliverance is gone.

Feinberg: Harvest of barley, wheat, and spelt came in April, May, and June; harvest of summer fruits like figs, grapes, and pomegranates came in August and September, and of olives in October. If these were not provided, no fruit was garnered for the winter.

C. (:21-22) Broken Heart

1. (:21) Anguish
*“For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken;
I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me.”*

Byron Chesney:

These are the words of Jeremiah. He says he is hurt, black, and astonished.

- He is hurt because his heart is broken.
- He is black because he is in mourning and in ashes.
- He is astonished because the people refused to turn to the LORD and are now in utter devastation.

2. (:22) Despair
*“Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?
Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?”*

Mackay: Gilead lay to the east of the Jordan between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. It was a rugged and wooded area (**Gen. 37:25; Ezek. 27:17**) that had long been associated with an aromatic resin which was used as a soothing ointment and also gave a pleasant odour (**46:11; 51:8**).

Adam Clarke: The people are morally diseased; they have sinned against God, and provoked him to destroy them. They are warned by the prophet to repent and turn to God: they refuse, and sin on. Destruction is come upon them. Might they not have avoided it? Yes. Was it the fault of God? No. Did he not send his prophets with the richest offers of mercy? Did he not give them time, the best instructions, and the most effectual means of returning to him? Has not mercy, the heavenly balm, been ever at hand? And has not God, the great Physician, been ever ready to apply it? Yes. Why then are they not converted and healed? Because they would not apply to the Divine Physician, nor receive the only remedy by which they could be spiritually healed. They, then, that sin against the only remedy must perish, because they might have had it, but would not. It is not because there is a deficiency of grace, nor of the means of grace, that men are not saved; but because they either make no use, or a bad use, of them. Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, has tasted death for every man; but few are saved, because they Will Not come unto him that they may have life.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where does our sin push us to behave in irrational ways?
- 2) What type of false security and false claims of “Peace” do we draw from our Christian associations and our familiarity with the Word of God?
- 3) Is our heart broken like Jeremiah’s was over the sinful state of our neighbors . . . our city ... our country?
- 4) Are we availing ourselves of the balm that is available in Gilead to address our sinful condition?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: (:18-21) MOURNING -- The section is chiasmic in the speaker, **ABCBA**, with God at the center.

1. **18: Jeremiah.** The first word is excruciatingly difficult. If we follow the AV, which is as good as anything at this point, Jeremiah here exemplifies the true believer's response to false comfort. Unlike the false teachers and their congregations, he can find no peace in the face of God's verdict.

2. **19a: People.** Jeremiah quotes their cry. AV "*because of them that dwell in a far country*" is not as straightforward as, simply, "from a far country." He sees the nation already in exile, and from there bemoaning their fate. They still can't figure out how, with their magical god-box, they could have been defeated. "*Isn't the Lord in Zion?*"

How could this have happened?

3. **19b: God** answers the people's question with one of his own: "*Has it ever occurred to you that your idolatry might have something to do with it?*" NB: If God is not first in our lives, if obedience to him is not the top priority, then it's no good calling on him in time of trouble.

4. **20: People.** They express their despair with a proverbial expression. In an agricultural economy, if you don't raise enough during the year, you go hungry all winter. What dismal prospects there are when "*the harvest is past, the summer is ended.*" All opportunities for help are over; the "accepted time," the "day of salvation" (**2 Cor. 6:2**, quoting **Isa. 49:8**), is past, and now there is no salvation.

5. **21: Jeremiah:** Enters fully into mourning for the suffering of his people. NB: No holier-than-thou prophet, he. Though they have rejected the truth, he weeps for them rather than gloating over their suffering. So we ought to mourn over fallen Christendom, and never boast ourselves in our supposed superiority.

Matthew Henry: The same subtlety of the tempter that brings men to sin holds them fast in it, and they contribute to their own captivity: They hold fast deceit. Sin is a great cheat, and they hold it fast; they love it dearly, and resolve to stick to it, and baffle all the methods God takes to separate between them and their sins. The excuses they make for their sins are deceits, and so are all their hopes of impunity; yet they hold fast these, and will not be undeceived, and therefore they refuse to return

Paul Rendall: There is a Balm in Gilead

The people to whom Jeremiah now ministered, considered themselves to be in a hopeless condition. And yet their hopeless resignation led on to paralysis. It is like a person with a disease which could be cured if they would only go to the doctor. "Is there no balm in Gilead?" "Is there no physician there?" It is a strange thing, is it not, when the physician weeps more over the patient's condition than the patient does over himself. And yet, such was the case of our prophet Jeremiah who would see souls saved from sin; that killing disease that renders men, women, and children hopeless and helpless! He says in **verse 21**, "*For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt.*" "*I am mourning.*" His heart was sorrowing and his heart was faint within him. He heard the voice, the cry of the daughter of his people from a far country – in captivity. "*Is not the Lord in Zion?*" "*Is not her King in her?*" And the answer from God was – "**Why have they provoked Me to anger with their carved images and foreign idols?**"

God is still provoked today by our idols; our greed, our covetousness, our immorality, and our deceitfulness and pride. But, if we will repent and ask, "What have I done?", God will hear, and He will heal. There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin-sick soul. It is the balm of the gospel; repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. Jesus is the Great Physician who will pour the balm of His grace into the wounds of your heart. He will not heal you slightly or give you false peace. He will take away the love of sinning, and give you a New Heart and a New Mind. He will make you

whole. May your soul be gathered in harvest to Jesus. Will you trust Him in the summer of your life? Then much fruit will be gathered in the harvest of the last day to Christ's glory. Are you in the fall or winter of life? Trust Him still, for much good can be done even in a few years, and God can multiply the effects of what is given for Christ, and done for Him, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Peter Wallace: material in chaps 8-9 structured in 2 chiasms:

1. Judah's Problem: They Do Not Know Me (8:4-9:6)

- a. My People Do Not Know the Rules of the LORD (8:4-7)
- b. They Have Dealt Falsely and Rejected the Word of the LORD (8:8-10)
- c. They Have Healed the Wound of the Daughter of My People Lightly (8:10-12)
- d. An Empty Harvest (8:13)
- e. Why? Because We Have Sinned (8:14-15)
- f. The Army of Terror Comes and Devours the Land (16-17)
- e'. If the LORD Is King, Why Have They Provoked Me? (8:18-19)
- d'. The Harvest Is Over, and We Are Not Saved (8:20)
- c'. My Heart Is Wounded for the Wound of the Daughter of My People (8:21-9:1)
- b'. Falsehood Has Grown Strong in the Land (9:2-3)
- a'. They Refuse to Know Me, Declares the LORD (9:4-6)

2. Judah's Future: The Death of a Nation (9:7-26)

- a. I Will Punish Jerusalem (9:7-11)
- b. Who is the Wise Man? (9:12-14)
- c. I Will Feed Them Bitter Food and Scatter Them among the Nations (9:15-16)
- d. Call for the Mourning Women to Come and Wail (9:17-19)
- d'. Teach Your Daughters a Lament (9:20-21)
- c'. The Dead Bodies of Men Shall Fall Like Dung upon the Open Field (9:22)
- b'. Let Not the Wise Man Boast in His Wisdom – but that He Knows Me (9:23-24)
- a'. The Days Are Coming When I Will Punish the Uncircumcised – in Heart (9:25-26)

TEXT: Jeremiah 9:1-26

TITLE: CIRCUMCISED PHYSICALLY BUT NOT SPIRITUALLY

BIG IDEA:

FALSE CONFIDENCE IN COVENANT IDENTITY PUNCTURED BY THE DESOLATION RESULTING FROM APOSTASY

INTRODUCTION:

Pride and self-sufficiency are like a big balloon of hot air. Once punctured, the air quickly pours out and you are left with a deflated, worthless skin with no substance. That is how Jeremiah perceived the false boasting of the Jews of his day. They were so secure in their covenant identity as the chosen people of God – an identity marked out by the physical sign of circumcision in their bodies and the religious rites and sacrifices they performed at the temple in Jerusalem. But Jeremiah wept over their apostasy and the multitude of their iniquities. He saw that at their core they were defined by lying and exploitation rather than truth and love for their neighbor.

FALSE CONFIDENCE IN COVENANT IDENTITY PUNCTURED BY THE DESOLATION RESULTING FROM APOSTASY

I. (:1-6) APOSTASY REFLECTED IN LITANY OF INIQUITY – CULTURE OF INIQUITY INCONSISTENT WITH COVENANT IDENTITY

A. (:1-3) Fundamental Problem = Apostasy Clothed in Lying and Deceit

1. (:1-2a) Lamentation and Revulsion

- a. (:1) Image of Lamentation – Weeping Over the Desolation
*“Oh that my head were waters and my eyes a fountain of tears,
that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my
people!”*

this verse ties to what came before as well; some commentators don’t like the current chapter division at this point

- b. (:2a) Image of Revulsion – Retreat to Hide
*“O that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place;
that I might leave my people, and go from them!”*

Feinberg: Two strong emotions gripped Jeremiah: great sympathy for his people and utter revulsion against their many sins. The life of the people was so corrupt as to make it impossible for Jeremiah to live among them.

MacArthur: Simple square buildings with an open court were built in remote areas to accommodate caravans. Though it would be lonely and filthy in the wilderness, Jeremiah preferred it to Jerusalem so as to be removed from the moral pollution of the people, which he described in vv. 3-8.

Mackay: There is still a basic identification with the people. They are “*my people*”, but his spirit is so grieved by their behavior that he wants to abandon them, that is, his prophetic ministry to them. Of course, he did not.

2. (:2b-3) Litany of Iniquity

a. (:2b) Loyalty Issue – Spiritual Adultery

“For all of them are adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.”

b. (:3a) Crooked Speech

“And they bend their tongue like their bow;”

Paul Rendall: bows were strung by putting your leg over the bow itself and bending the bow down, to bring the looped string to the notch at the top of the bow.

Refusal to shoot straight

c. (:3b) Characteristic Sin: Lying

“Lies and not truth prevail in the land;”

d. (:3c) Progressive Wickedness

“For they proceed from evil to evil,”

e. (:3d) Root Issue: No Personal Relationship with God

*“And **they do not know Me,**’ declares the LORD.”*

Mackay: This lack of knowledge is not at a formal, intellectual level, but at the level of inner commitment to the Lord and consequent willingness to live by the expressed standards of his covenant.

B. (:4-6) Fractured Relationships Characterized by Lying and Rejection of God

1. (:4a) No Trust

*“Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor,
and do not trust any brother;”*

2. (:4b-5a) No Truth

*“Because every brother deals craftily,
and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer.
And everyone deceives his neighbor,
and does not speak the truth,”*

3. (:5b-6) No Transparency

*“They have taught their tongue to speak lies;
They weary themselves committing iniquity.
‘Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit;
Through deceit **they refuse to know Me,**’ declares the LORD.”*

Thompson: In Judah's wanton rejection of Yahweh as the Lord of the covenant and the One who once took her from Egypt to lead her to a fair land, Jeremiah too saw the seeds of judgment, and like Amos made use of the verb *paqad*, "call to account" (v. 9). The breach of the covenant was the occasion for the operation of the curses of the covenant.

Feinberg: To show the unnaturalness of their wickedness, Jeremiah says that the people trained their tongues contrary to their proper function (v.5b). Lying takes more effort than speaking the truth, but they were willing to endure the drudgery of sin. They persisted in wrongdoing.

II. (:7-16) APOSTASY REWARDED WITH DESERVED JUDGMENTS – CULTURE OF WRATH INCONSISTENT WITH COVENANT IDENTITY

A. (:7-9) Judgments Required by the Jealous Nature of God

1. (:7) Divine Refining Required

"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I will refine them and assay them; For what else can I do, because of the daughter of My people?'"

These are God's children who have rejected Him and turned to other gods; process of divine refining is needed; maybe there is something that can be salvaged

Cf. 6:27-30

2. (:8) Deceitful Speech

"Their tongue is a deadly arrow; It speaks deceit; With his mouth one speaks peace to his neighbor, But inwardly he sets an ambush for him."

3. (:9) Deserving of Judgment

"'Shall I not punish them for these things?' declares the LORD. 'On a nation such as this shall I not avenge Myself?'"

Thompson: The use of the term *goy* for Israel may represent the transfer to Israel of a term which was regularly used of non-Israelite peoples. Its use here suggests that Jeremiah had come to regard the people as no different in their behavior from the *goyim*, the peoples outside the covenant. Certainly, whatever they might claim, there was nothing about them to suggest that their covenant with Yahweh had produced in them ethical responses which would mark them out from others around them.

B. (:10-11) Judgments Described in Images of Desolation

1. (:10) Desolation of the Land -- Land Laid Waste

"For the mountains I will take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness a dirge, Because they are laid waste, so that no one passes through, And the lowing of the cattle is not heard; Both the birds of the sky and the beasts have fled; they are gone."

2. (:11) Desolation of the Cities -- Cities Laid Waste

“And I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, A haunt of jackals; And I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.”

Mackay: implies the devastation is so complete that there is no possibility of rebuilding and living in the ruins. Such an outcome had long been threatened if the terms of the covenant were not observed (**Lev. 26:33; Deut. 28:64**).

Feinberg: So complete will the devastation be that only scavengers will remain (**v. 11**).

Ryken: Jackals were the wild scavengers of ancient Israel. They prowled in the remote places, living off leftovers, scraps, and carcasses. “A *haunt of jackals*” is an uninhabitable place of darkness, death, and destruction, fit only for beasts, not for humans.

C. (:12-16) Judgments Executed According to the Severity of the Apostasy

1. (:12) Discernment of God’s Ways Hidden From the Apostates

a. (:12a) Who Can Explain This Judgment?

“Who is the wise man that may understand this?

And who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD has spoken, that he may declare it?”

b. (:12b) Why This Judgment?

“Why is the land ruined, laid waste like a desert, so that no one passes through?”

2. (:13-14) Direction of the Apostates is Perverted

a. (:13) Rebellion

“And the LORD said, ‘Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice nor walked according to it,’”

b. (:14) Realignment

“but have walked after the stubbornness of their heart and after the Baals, as their fathers taught them,”

3. (:15-16) Destruction of Apostates Worked Out in Various Forms of Judgment

a. (:15) Bitter Poison

“therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood and give them poisoned water to drink.’”

b. (:16a) Unsettling Dislocation

“And I will scatter them among the nations, whom neither they nor their fathers have known;”

c. (:16b) Violent Destruction

“and I will send the sword after them until I have annihilated them.”

III. (:17-22) APOSTASY REGRETTED IN FUNERAL DIRGE MOURNING - CULTURE OF DEATH INCONSISTENT WITH COVENANT IDENTITY

A. (:17-19) Funeral Dirge Appropriate for Apostates

1. (:17-18) Pervasive Wailing

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Consider and call for the mourning women, that they may come; And send for the wailing women, that they may come! And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, That our eyes may shed tears, And our eyelids flow with water.’”

2. (:19) Pervasive Desolation

“For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion, ‘How are we ruined! We are put to great shame, For we have left the land, Because they have cast down our dwellings.’”

B. (:20-22) Funeral Dirge Appropriate for Apostates

1. (:20) Pervasive Wailing

“Now hear the word of the LORD, O you women, And let your ear receive the word of His mouth; Teach your daughters wailing, And everyone her neighbor a dirge.”

Mackay: The catastrophe about to engulf the nation is so extensive that all must be trained to take part in the lamentation. (cf. **Luke 23:28-29**)

2. (:21-22) Pervasive Death

“For death has come up through our windows; It has entered our palaces To cut off the children from the streets, The young men from the town squares. Speak, ‘Thus declares the LORD, The corpses of men will fall like dung on the open field, And like the sheaf after the reaper, But no one will gather them.’”

Ryken: According to Jeremiah, Death is the prowler who comes by night, the stalker who peeks in the window, the intruder who climbs into the house to commit murder. Death is the stealthy assassin who penetrates the defenses and slips into the fortified castle. Or Death is a body snatcher: *“It has cut off our children from the streets and the young men from the public squares”* (v. **21b**). Death even grabs kids off the city playground. There is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide. Worse still, Death treats the dead like so much garbage, denying them a proper burial.

Mackay: When the reaper put his sickle into the crop, he gathered it in his arm until there was too much to hold, when he put it down in a heap for another to come and gather them up and tie it into a sheaf. But here what is envisaged is a scene with not one to gather them. The wheat lies wasting on the ground because there is no one left to bind the sheaves. It is a picture of a devastating disaster.

IV. (:23-26) APPLICATION: APOSTASY REVERSED BY BOASTING IN THE LORD –

INDICTMENT OF FALSE CONFIDENCE IN COVENANT IDENTITY

A. (:23-24) False Confidence in the Flesh vs. Confidence in the Lord

1. (:23) False Confidence

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches;’”

2. (:24) True Confidence

“but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the LORD.”

Quoted in **1 Cor. 1:31; 2 Cor. 10:17**

Thompson: In this brief statement therefore we have a succinct summary of the religion of Israel at its highest. Wisdom, strength, and riches, however valuable they may be when properly used, are altogether subordinate to the knowledge of God. True religion consists in acknowledging the complete sovereignty of God in life and allowing him to fill life with those qualities of steadfast faithfulness, justice, and righteousness which he possesses, in which he delights, and which he desires to find in his people.

John Shearouse: The Lord tells us not to glory in these things. He is telling them not glory in them because His judgement is coming, and when it does,

- The self-sufficient wise man will be a fool... - all his counsel will be lost...
- The self-sufficient mighty man will be weak... - he will be helpless to defend his people—perhaps even dead on the battlefield...
- The self-sufficient rich man will be poor... - all his riches will go to another

Henry Mahan: Now what do we mean by glory? That’s important here . . . it means to honor; it means to honor and exalt a thing or a person. It is to rejoice in something and take great pride in it. And it is even to worship that person or thing and give it the place; here’s the key, of preeminence in our lives. That’s what it means to glory in something.

Cooper: The knowledge of God, here meant, is a knowledge of Him in His true character and perfections. It is a knowledge of Him as being at once a merciful Father and a righteous Judge; a just God, and yet a Saviour; abounding in mercy, love, and truth; and at the same time hating iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. The knowledge spoken of in the text is an inward, heartfelt, experimental knowledge of Him. It is such a belief of Him in our hearts, as leads us to fear and love Him, to rely on and confide in Him. It is a knowledge founded on trial and experience.

B. (:25-26) False Confidence in Religious Formalism Leads to Judgment

“Behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘that I will punish all who are

circumcised and yet uncircumcised-- Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the sons of Ammon, and Moab, and all those inhabiting the desert who clip the hair on their temples; for all the nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart.”

Outward circumcision will not exempt one from judgment for a lack of inner righteousness. You cannot trust in religious formalism. Apart from confidence and faithfulness in God you are no different than the pagan nations.

Longman: The people of God may have practiced complete circumcision, but they were not really circumcised because it was not reflected in their life and behavior.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do I look no different in character than those who are uncircumcised in heart?
- 2) How is our society given over to falsehood?
- 3) Who is going to follow in the footsteps of Jeremiah and lament and weep for the sins of Christendom and of our nation?
- 4) How can we do a better job of resisting false confidence and openly boasting only in the Lord Jesus?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Warren Wiersbe: Jeremiah had to deal with the pride [and false confidence] of his people as he pointed out to them three obvious truths.

- 1) Being God’s covenant people is no excuse for sin (vv. 1-6).
- 2) Being God’s covenant people offers no escape from judgment (vv. 7-16)
- 3) Being God’s covenant people is no assurance of spiritual understanding (vv. 17-26).

No amount of education, power, or wealth – three things the world today depends on and boasts about – can guarantee the blessing of God.. God doesn’t delight in a nation’s learning, political influence, armies, or gross national product. He delights in a people who practice kindness, justice, and righteousness because they know and fear the Lord. God promises covenant blessings to those who obey Him, not to those who only submit to religious ceremonies.

Ryken: Boast about the understanding and knowledge of God. Your boast is not that you understand and know God. The only reason you know God is because he has revealed himself through his Word and his world. But you may boast about God himself. The Christian's proper boast is in a Godward direction.

So boast about this, that God is the Lord who made heaven and earth, the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the Lord who met Moses at the burning bush and brought the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt. He is the Lord who helped Joshua conquer the Promised Land, and whom David praised when he said "*The Lord is my shepherd*" (**Psalm 23:1**). He is the Lord who sent fire to consume Elijah's altar when all the people said, "*The Lord, he is God! The Lord – he is God!*" (**1 Kings 18:39**). And he is the same Lord who brought his people back from their captivity in Babylon.

To boast in the Lord is also to boast in Jesus Christ. A boast about the Godness of God is a boast about the Lordship of Jesus Christ. . .

Boast that the Lord exercises "*kindness*" on earth (Jeremiah 9:24). . . It means covenant loyalty, steadfast love, unflinching devotion, and merciful affection. . .

Boast in the justice . . . and in the righteousness of the Lord . . .

Byron Chesney: This verse is one of those that tags Jeremiah as being "the Weeping Prophet," and rightfully so. He has been weeping already, so much so that he no longer has any tears to weep. He wishes he could weep even more, because as an inhabitant of Judah there was much to weep about:

- He weeps over how his own people have fallen into apostasy.
- He weeps as the LORD gives them many chances to repent of their sin yet they refuse to do so.
- He weeps as he warns them over and over and they reject him and his message.
- He weeps over seeing families ripped apart.
- He weeps over seeing the land devastated.
- He weeps over seeing their homes destroyed.
- He weeps over them becoming slaves to their enemies.

Friends, we too have much to weep about in the day in which we live:

- Millions of babies being murdered in their mother's womb because of abortion.
- Millions of drug addicts living their life for nothing more than the next high.
- Millions of drunks destroying their lives and families for another bottle.
- Millions of homeless due to the sins of this world.
- Millions of people lost, dying, and going to hell because of their wickedness.
- Churches closing every single day from lack of people attending.
- Hundreds of Pastors quitting the ministry due to stress and lack of support.
- A generation of people that are coming up that don't know God.

Henry Mahan: I can show you many examples of people who have gloried in things, not the Lord, but gloried in things, and had these things destroy them, these things turned

out to be great grief.

For example: **Hezekiah** took the ambassadors of Babylon from treasure house to treasure house. He was a wealthy king. He had a fabulous kingdom. He had treasure houses and diamonds, gold, and silver and precious stones and all these things. And the visitors from Babylon came over and he was proud of his kingdom. He took them around from treasure house to treasure house bragging and boasting of his riches. Well that displeased the Lord. And these very men to whom he boasted came back and carried away all of his beautiful treasures. He lost all of them. He was so proud, so boastful, and these very men that he took and showed his treasure houses, came and emptied them.

And then **Herod**; Herod made a great speech one day, a great oration. And he allowed the people to praise him. Oh, it was a great speech and the people began to say, "It's not the voice of a man; it's the voice of a god." But boy did that make him happy, that really pleased him. And he didn't correct them. He allowed people to brag on his great speech and his great powers of persuasion. And they called his voice "the voice of a god." Well, God proved his humanity. God filled his whole body with worms and he was eaten of worms and destroyed, the proud flesh that exalted itself above God. God proved his humanity and he was died a shameful, horrible, death, a rotten death. God proved he was a man.

All right; consider **Eve**. Adam and Eve had a son, the first son born to them. And if you'll read some of the better translations you will find when Eve got that boy in her arm, that first son; Cain was his name. And when she gave birth to that first son, and evidently Adam laid that son in her arms, she said this; "I've gotten a man, from the Lord." But do you know what she said? "I've gotten a man, the Lord" (some of the translations say). Now then; God had promised to redeem her. He'd promised that the Redeemer would come through a woman and Eve thought she held him in her arms. She thought this was the redeemer. She thought she had given birth to the deliverer. But she had given birth to the one who was deceived, Cain, the one whom Satan tried and tempted. And she called that son of hers "the Lord." Well, he proved to be the first murderer. He broke his momma's heart. He killed his brother.

And then **Jacob**; Jacob gloried in the coat of many colors. He gave it to his favorite son. Well, he brought him that coat back shredded, torn to pieces, and covered with blood.

David the mighty king of Israel, God told David; "Now David I know how many people I've got and I don't need you to number them." Well David had climbed to the heights of his splendid kingdom and he got proud of his armies and proud of his kingdom. And even though God told him not to number them he numbered Israel. He had to know how many swordsmen and how many spearmen and how many of the cavalry and how many of these different ones he had. So, he numbered them. And his general told him "you shouldn't have done that." And God came to him and told him he shouldn't have done it too. And the Lord killed 70,000 of his choice men because he numbered Israel.

Pride; we want to glory in something don't we? Eve gloried in that son. And Hezekiah gloried in his riches and David gloried in his strength and Herod gloried in his voice.

What about **Peter**? Our Lord was going to the cross and He told His disciples; He said; *"All of you will be offended because of me this night."* Peter rose up and threw back his chest, threw back his shoulders and he said, "Not me. Now these other fellows may desert you Lord, but not me. These other fellows may deny you, but not me." Peter said, "I'll lay down my life for you." Do you know my friend; he was the only one who verbally, (now the rest of them deserted) but he was the only one who verbally denied his Lord. He was the only one who said, "I know not the man." Now you think about that.

The **rich young ruler** gloried in his righteousness and died an unbeliever. The rich young man gloried in his wealth and died in spiritual poverty.

We better be careful. God said, *"Thus saith the Lord; let not the wise man glory in his wisdom and let not the mighty man glory in his strength. And let not the rich man glory in his riches."* That very thing in which you glory may just turn out to be your greatest grief. It may turn out to be your destroyer. You make a god out of that little lump of clay you are holding in your arms and it may turn out to be your destroyer. It may bring gray hair to your head and a broken heart and tears to your eyes because God's a jealous God. He will not share His glory.

This is **vain glory**. These are examples of vain glory and examples of people reaping the dividends of vain glory. Christ said, *"He that loveth father, mother, brother, sister, husband and wife, more than me, yea, his own life, cannot be my disciple."*

Now God has prepared a cure for vain glory. I can give you a cure for vain glory if you want it. I can give you a cure for vain glory. Now, the cure for vain glory is not to suppress the tendency in man to glory; man's going to glory in something. You can't just come to a fellow and say, "Now just don't glory in anything." He's got pride. He's going to put it in something. He has honor to give and he's going to give honor. And he's got affection to show and he's going to show it. . .

The chief end of man is to **glorify God**. *"He that glorieth let him glory in the Lord."* You know, when we glory in the Lord, if we can be brought to this place, and how I want it, and how I want it for you, if we can be brought to the place where we glory in the Lord, not in things or people, but where we glory in the Lord; we'll be in full accord with God's universe and with God's kingdom. . .

Yes, when we glorify God we are in tune with the universe and we are in tune with the angels and we are in tune with the Son of God and we're in tune with the Holy Spirit and we're already rehearsing the song we'll sing in heaven; *"Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood and made us kings and priests unto God to Him be glory both now and forever."* That's the song of heaven. . .

TEXT: Jeremiah 10:1-25

TITLE: 20/20 VISION REGARDING GOD VS IDOLS

BIG IDEA:

REJECT THE FUTILITY OF PAGAN IDOLATRY BY FOCUSING ON THE POWER AND MAJESTY OF THE UNIQUE LIVING AND ETERNAL GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Dead and worthless idols made by human hands should never compete for our loyalty and affections with the power and majesty of the unique living and eternal God. What an indictment of God's people that they would ever exchange the glory of their Creator and King for the impotence of tottering pieces of wood. Yet the spiritual leaders themselves have been instrumental in scattering God's flock and subjecting it to the type of devastation you imagine to be reserved for pagan nations.

REJECT THE FUTILITY OF PAGAN IDOLATRY BY FOCUSING ON THE POWER AND MAJESTY OF THE UNIQUE LIVING AND ETERNAL GOD

the end of Jeremiah's temple sermon that started in Chap. 7

I. (:1-5) SEE IDOLS FOR WHAT THEY ARE – DON'T FEAR THEM

(:1) Call to Attention

"Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel."

Constable: This scathing expose of the folly of idolatry resembles several polemics in Isaiah (cf. **Isaiah 40:18-20; Isaiah 41:6-7; Isaiah 44:9-20; Isaiah 46:5-7**). **Jeremiah 10:12-16** appear again in **Jeremiah 51:15-19**.

Mackay: While the designation "*house of Israel*" may refer to the northern kingdom, these words are addressed to Judah and Jerusalem as the remaining representatives of the covenant people as in **9:26**. In this way there is a suitable link back to the preceding discussion of circumcision, the mark of the true covenant people.

A. (:2) Fear of Idols Characterizes Pagans

"Thus says the LORD, 'Do not learn the way of the nations, And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens although the nations are terrified by them;'"

Believers are not to live like pagans; don't be inquiring after *the signs of the heavens*

Mackay: "*terrified*" – a strong word denoting inability to act or think things through because of outside pressure. . . They could not free themselves from the notion that these supposed gods could and would act malevolently in their lives. That explains the emphasis in this polemic on the reality, originality and power of the Lord. It is an attempt to meet the needs of the people in their insecurity over against the dominant

interpretation of events in the world as propagated by the pagan thinking of their culture and environment.

Pagans live in fear all the time – terrified by their astrological fortunes – should be fearing the Lord instead

Calvin: He then mentions the error in which the Chaldeans and the Egyptians were involved; for they were, we know, very attentive observers of the stars. And this is expressly stated, because the Jews despised God’s judgments, and greatly feared what were foolishly divined. For when any one, by looking at the stars, threatened them with some calamity, they were immediately terrified; but when God denounced on them, as with the sound of a trumpet, a calamity by his Prophets, they were not at all moved.

Constable: He warned his people not to be disciples of the Gentile nations, specifically not to let the celestial phenomena-that the nations looked to for guidance-frighten them. The nations regarded abnormalities in the heavens as divine signs, and held them in awe, particularly unusual phenomena such as comets, meteors, and eclipses. But it was Yahweh who controlled these things (cf. **Genesis 1:14; Habakkuk 3:4; Habakkuk 3:11**).

Feinberg: Idol worship was attended by elaborate ritual, motivated by demonic power, and accompanied by moral looseness. . .

B. (:3-5a) Exposure of the Delusional Value of Idols

1. (:3) Man-made

“For the customs of the peoples are delusion; Because it is wood cut from the forest, The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool.”

Who is greater? The craftsman or the idol he crafts? We pride ourselves on not being like these foolish pagans, but we continue to worship idols today

Brian Bell: Def. of Idol: That on which I set my Attention & Affection, & that for which I am willing to Sacrifice for. {It becomes a substitute for God}; Quoting **Tozer:** “Idolatry is the entertaining of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him!” We want to get God down to where we can use him – At least we’ll know where He is when we need Him! – We want a God we can in some measure control – We develop a God who is a composite of all the religious people we’ve seen – The best people we’ve known or heard about, & all the sublime ideas we’ve entertained!

2. (:4) Decorated and Propped Up to Appear Something They Are Not

“They decorate it with silver and with gold; They fasten it with nails and with hammers So that it will not totter.”

Idols can’t stand on their own; they have no inner reality and power -- just external trappings.

3. (:5a) Lifeless, Mute and Powerless

*“Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field are they, And they cannot speak;
They must be carried, because they cannot walk!”*

Constable: These idols were similar to scarecrows, whose only power is to frighten birds. They did not speak to command, counsel, or comfort their worshippers. They could not walk to come to the aid of their devotees. People had to carry them; they were burdens to be borne rather than bearers of their suppliants' burdens. God's people should not fear them because they do neither harm nor good. They are "do-nothing" gods.

C. (:5b) Fear of Idols Falsely Inconsistent with Their Impotency

“Do not fear them, For they can do no harm, Nor can they do any good.”

Why be loyal to an idol? There is nothing to gain.

II. (:6-16) SEE THE ONE TRUE GOD FOR WHO HE IS – WORSHIP AND FEAR HIM ALONE

A. (:6-9) Contrast Between the Lord and Idols in Their Essence

1. (:6-8) Uniqueness of Majestic God

“There is none like Thee, O LORD; Thou art great, and great is Thy name in might. Who would not fear Thee, O King of the nations? Indeed it is Thy due! For among all the wise men of the nations, And in all their kingdoms, There is none like Thee.”

Dave Durant: Jews would have connected wisdom not with science and technology and institutes of higher learning but with a great king like Solomon who was able to rule with justice and righteousness. (**1 Kings 3**)

Thompson: The incomparability of Yahweh is a theme that is writ large in the OT. He is incomparable, great in himself and great in his name (or character). Whereas idols derive their status and authority solely from human sources, Yahweh derives his position and authority from himself alone. He stand unique. That being so, the prophet can say, *Who should not fear thee, King of the nations, for this is thy due?*

2. (:8-9) Futility of Man-Made Idols

“But they are altogether stupid and foolish In their discipline of delusion-- their idol is wood! Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, And gold from Uphaz, The work of a craftsman and of the hands of a goldsmith; Violet and purple are their clothing; They are all the work of skilled men.”

B. (:10-16) Contrast Between the Lord and Idols in Their Effectiveness

1. (:10) The True God Lives and Should be Feared

“But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. At His wrath the earth quakes, And the nations cannot endure His indignation.”

3 Affirmations about God:

- The only True God
- The Living God
- The Everlasting King
-

Calvin: He sets truth here in opposition to vanities. He had said that wood was the teaching of vanities; he now says, God is eternal truth; that is, he has no need of adventitious ornaments; they mask, he says, the idols of the heathens, they are clothed and adorned; but these things have nothing real in them: Jehovah is God the truth; that is, God borrows nothing from anything else, but is satisfied with himself, and his power possesses of itself sufficient authority. God then is truth, and God, he says, is life. After having said that God has real and solid glory in himself, he adds another proof, taken from what is known to men, even that God is life; for though God is in himself incomprehensible, yet he not only sets before our eyes evidences of his glow, but he also renders himself in a manner the object of feeling, as Paul says in **Acts 14:17**. What he means is, that though men were blind, they could yet by feeling find out God. Though the blind have no sight, yet they can find their way by feeling; they go round a hall or a room, and by feeling find the door; and when they wish to enter into a room, they find the door by the same means. But there is no need, says Paul, for us to depart from ourselves; for whosoever will examine himself will find God within; for in him we live and move and have our being. (**Acts 17:28**.) Were we then to object and say, that God is incomprehensible, and that we cannot ascend to the height of his glory, doubtless there is life in us, and as we have life, we have an evidence of his divinity; for who is so devoid of reason as to say that he lives through himself? Since then men live not of themselves, but obtain life as a favor from another, it follows that God dwells in them.

Chuck Smith: Nature of the substitutes for God.

1. Brutish and foolish.
2. Stock doctrine of vanities.
3. There is no breath in them.

Contrasted with true God - vs. 10.

1. True God.
2. Living God.
3. Everlasting King.
4. Powerful, wise, discrete - vs. 12

Mackay: “*trembles*” – This brings out the fact of human accountability to the Lord. He is the one whose anger at sin and at the conduct of the nations is something that must be taken into account, because he has absolute power to enforce his decrees.

2. (:11-13) The Lifeless Idols Will Perish While the True God Demonstrates His Power

a. (:11) Lifeless Idols Will Perish

“Thus you shall say to them, ‘The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’”

David Guzik: **Vs. 11** may have been a popular anti-idolatry proverb or saying of that time, quoted in Aramaic. It is the only verse in Jeremiah in Aramaic, a language quite similar to Hebrew.

Thompson: (**v. 12**) The power, wisdom, and understanding of Yahweh are set in striking contrast to the weakness, foolishness, and witless character of the idols. Yahweh alone stand sovereign over the whole created universe (cf. **Isa. 40:12-17**).

Parunak: Note the chiastic structure:

The gods

 who heaven

 and earth

 did not make (abadu)

 shall perish (y"badu)

 from the earth

 and from under heaven,

these [gods].

b. (:12-13) True God Demonstrates His Power

(1) (:12) Power Demonstrated in Creation

“It is He who made the earth by His power, Who established the world by His wisdom; And by His understanding He has stretched out the heavens.”

(2) (:13) Power Demonstrated in Nature

“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 out the wind from His storehouses.”

Ryken: This is a beautiful psalm written to praise a beautiful God. In it Jeremiah provided an outline for an entire Sunday school class on the doctrine of God, covering the uniqueness, power, sovereignty, wisdom, truth, eternity, creation, and providence of God.

3. (:14-16) Only the True God Grants a Lasting Inheritance

a. (:14-15) Idol Worshipers are Stupid

“Every man is stupid, devoid of knowledge; Every goldsmith is

*put to shame by his idols; For his molten images are deceitful,
And there is no breath in them. They are worthless, a work of
mockery; In the time of their punishment they will perish.”*

Thompson: Three succinct phrases in **vs. 15** describe the idols. They are a *nonentity*, a *work of delusion*; at the time of their *reckoning* they will perish. It is a final devastating demolition of these worthless things.

b. (:16) God Worshipers Enjoy a Lasting Inheritance

*“The portion of Jacob is not like these; For the Maker of all is
He, And Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; The LORD of hosts
is His name.”*

Parunak: YHWH is incomparable in his creative power and care of his people. Here God's creation and administration are mingled together: ABAB. In his relation to his people, he is their portion and they are his inheritance; they belong to one another. In view of his power, he is the one who has created everything, and thus is the Lord of (the heavenly) hosts. None among the pagan gods can compare with him.

Mackay: the idea of the Oord as the portion of his people is common (**Pss. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5; Lam. 3:24**).

III. (:17-25) SEE YOURSELF AS GOD SEES YOU

A. (:17-18) Helpless and Vulnerable – Cast out and exposed to oppression by enemies

“Pick up your bundle from the ground, You who dwell under siege! For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am slinging out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and will cause them distress, That they may be found.’”

Gather up whatever you can carry in your backpack because you are going to be driven away

Albert Barnes: I will project you with violence from your country. I will send you all into captivity. This discourse, from **Jeremiah 10:17**, is supposed to have been delivered in the eleventh year of Jehoiakim.

B. (:19-22) Hurting -- Broken, Scattered and Destroyed

1. (:19) Broken Body Metaphor

*“Woe is me, because of my injury! My wound is incurable. But I said,
‘Truly this is a sickness, And I must bear it.’”*

Thompson: The simplest way to understand these verses is to see in them the anguished cry of Jeremiah, who is so deeply identified with his people that his own lament can be equated with the lament of the nation.

2. (:20) Broken Tent Metaphor

“My tent is destroyed, And all my ropes are broken; My sons have gone from me and are no more. There is no one to stretch out my tent again Or to set up my curtains.”

Parunak: The enemy has spoiled the tent (stolen anything of value), and then collapsed it by cutting the tent ropes.

3. (:21) Scattered Flock Metaphor

“For the shepherds have become stupid And have not sought the LORD; Therefore they have not prospered, And all their flock is scattered.”

Parunak: The shepherd should be protecting the flock from wild animals. Instead, he has become like a wild animal himself; his animality manifests itself in rejection of the word of the Lord.

4. (:22) Coming Judgment Promised

“The sound of a report! Behold, it comes-- A great commotion out of the land of the north-- To make the cities of Judah A desolation, a haunt of jackals.”

Parunak: The enemy is coming from the north, to reduce Jerusalem's stone houses to a pile of rubble where only lizards can live.

C. (:23-25) Humbled – Seeking Mercy and Vengeance

1. (:23-24) Plea for Mercy in Context of Family Correction

“I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Correct me, O LORD, but with justice; Not with Thine anger, lest Thou bring me to nothing.”

No longer in control; the independent spirit of arrogance has been crushed

Mackay: Jeremiah is pleading for divine action because what has happened to the people has not been solely determined by them, but has come upon them because of external and uncontrollable factors. He is not presenting the people as guiltless in the situation, but rather helpless and in need of divine intervention from the one who really directs and controls the circumstances of life.

Constable: The prophet confessed that people do not have the wisdom to direct their own steps in safe and successful paths (cf. **Psalm 37:23; Proverbs 3:5-6; Proverbs 16:9; Proverbs 20:24**).

Brian Bell: 3 Arguments of Mercy:

[1] God must remember they are weak humans who don't know how to run their lives. Maybe thinking of **Ps.103:13,14** *“As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust.”*

[2] If God gave them what they deserved, they'd be destroyed!

Ps.103:10 *“He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities.”*

Or **Ezra 9:13** *“And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and have given us such deliverance as this”*

[3] The nations attacking Judah deserve punishment for seeking to destroy God's chosen people.

2. (:25) Plea for Vengeance Against Devouring Pagan Nations

“Pour out Thy wrath on the nations that do not know Thee, And on the families that do not call Thy name; For they have devoured Jacob; They have devoured him and consumed him, And have laid waste his habitation.”

Vengeance belongs to God.

Parunak: Finally we come to the response to **9:25-26**. God cannot treat Judah just like the other nations. Judah is the nation who knows him; who calls on his name. He must defend her against the pagans who abuse and destroy her.

Indeed, today, 2600 years after Jeremiah, the Babylonians and Assyrians, the nations who took Israel captive, are long gone, but the Jews continue as a distinctive racial group. He brought the nation back from captivity, and destroyed those who had abused them. **Ezek. 36:21-32**, God does this, not for their sake, but for the sake of his name which is upon them.

Kidner: This final prayer (**:23-25**) is one to sharpen our perception in three areas at least:

- first, about our collective blindness on our own, or at any rate our limited field of vision as we pick our way with our eyes down, without even an agreed destination, let alone a route.
- Secondly, about our individual need to be rectified and schooled by God, seeing the deep affront to him (**24b**) of our unresponsiveness.
- Thirdly, standing back from **verse 25**, we see the difference between the quite proper prayer of the Old Testament for judgment on the infidel and the oppressor, and the prayer in this day of grace for their salvation.

CONCLUSION:

Thompson: In that lay Jeremiah's dilemma. His heart told him to plead for divine mercy; but logic pointed to the inevitability of judgment on Judah also (cf. **Amos 5:18-20**). That Israel also should need to be punished in the way prescribed for the Gentiles

was the tragic result of centuries of unrestrained apostasy and the rejection of Yahweh's covenant and its demands.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What are some common idols people worship today?
- 2) How do you see God's power displayed in Creation and in Nature?
- 3) What type of inheritance are you expecting for all eternity?
- 4) What type of correction or humbling does God need to bring about in your life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Chiastic structure in vv. **10-16**

Here Jeremiah gives us a detailed example of glorying in the Lord, rather than in men by way of the idols that they make. The section is chiastic, alternating layers of comparison of the Lord and idols until we reach the center, where idols are once more decried in a verse written in Aramaic, the imperial language of the period (like an announcement to everyone in the area).

	Administrative Power over Men	Creative Power over Earth	
YHWH	6-7	16	Comparison; "name"
Idols	8-9	14-15	Brutish, vanity, artificial
YHWH	10	12-13	Earth, cosmic
Idols		11	

Mackay: Polemic against idolatry seems remote from modern concerns, but that is a major misconception. The idol was the product of human craftsmanship, and the ideology associated with pagan worship was the precipitate of corrupt human thinking. The pursuit of wealth and economic prowess still sets up human achievement and physical production as the goal of social activity. If the qualities that a civilization admires are ruthless exploitation and business success, it has created for itself a materialist culture where ultimate values are found in the world of things. This is the basis for an idolatrous society just as surely as the behavior of the ancient world. It leads to a society denying the existence, let alone the significance, of the spiritual realm. It sets up a society trying to live estranged from God and not realizing that its own downfall is inevitably entailed in the value system it has embraced, a system which

promotes human self-sufficiency and which seeks to find the ultimate basis for existence in what mankind dictate.

Ryken: Theologian **David Wells** defines idolatry as “trusting some substitute for God to serve some uniquely divine function . . . These substitutes need not be supernatural: money, power, expertise, the location of the planets on the astrological charts, and a belief in Progress are among the most popular idols of Our Time.” Such idols attract. They seem good. The trouble comes when they take God’s place.

Thompson: (vv. 1-16) Apart from the unusual Aramaic insertion in v. 11 it is possible to discern a reasonable pattern in which alternating assertions are made about idols and Yahweh. After an introductory segment (v.1), we have

- (i) a warning against idols (vv. 2-5)
- (ii) the supremacy of Yahweh (vv. 6-7)
- (iii) the futility of idols (vv. 8-9)
- (iv) the reality and creative power of Yahweh (vv. 10-13, with v. 11 a gloss)
- (v) the idols and their makers to be judged (vv. 14-15)
- (vi) final acknowledgment of Yahweh’s supremacy (v. 16)

Seen in this way the whole passage has coherence and order. . .

That there are parallels in thought and even in wording with some passages in Psalms and in Isaiah may indicate no more than that there was a traditional language of worship in Israel which was in use for a long period of time.

Peter Wallace: Sin Makes You Stupid

Jeremiah 10 concludes Jeremiah’s commentary on the temple sermon in Jeremiah 7. Last time we looked at the problem with Israel – and with us – as a problem of knowledge. “My people do not know the rules of the LORD” (8:7) “They do not know me, declares the LORD” (9:3) “They refuse to know me, declares the LORD” (9:6).

And in 9:24, God gave the solution to the problem of Judah’s lack of knowledge: “Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.” We have a **knowledge problem**. And the only solution is to know God.

We also have a **stupidity problem**. You can see how the passage fits together – organized around the word “stupid”: v8 – the idols of the nations are both stupid and foolish v14 – every man is stupid for making and trusting idols v21 – the shepherds of Israel are stupid for failing to inquire of the LORD. The word translated “stupid” can also be translated “brutish” – as in Psalm 73:22 – “I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast before you.”

I want you to think about the problem of stupidity. We were created in the image of God – in knowledge, holiness, and righteousness... Knowledge – and particularly, knowing God – is part of what it means to be human. When man exchanges the knowledge of God for idols, man is stupid – or, to say it another way, when man fails to

know and love God, man becomes like a beast.

Stupidity is not the same as ignorance. Ignorance may simply be a lack of knowledge. The solution to ignorance is usually education. But stupidity is a different sort of problem. No matter how much you teach a stupid person, they won't get it. When you call somebody stupid you are saying that in some sense they are "brutish" – they are less than fully human. That's why it is generally not very polite to call people stupid.

But Jeremiah goes so far as to say that every man is stupid. Humanity has become brutish. And, worse yet, when the shepherds of Israel are stupid – when they become like beasts – then the flock is scattered. How did this happen? Well, as Mark likes to say, "Sin makes you stupid."

1. Idols Are Stupid (v1-10)

a. Idols Cannot Speak or Do Anything (v2-5)

This idea of vanity/vapor is closely associated with idolatry. The customs of the peoples are vanity – what customs? Keep reading: A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move. 5 Their idols[b] are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, 3 for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good."

Isaiah 44 uses a similar picture of the futility of idols. The gods of the nations are literally fashioned by man. They are like scarecrows – they cannot move – they cannot speak. You spent all this money constructing your idol. You devoted so much of your life and treasure – but what good is it? It's like a scarecrow in a cucumber patch. You could have spent \$5 on it, and it would have worked just as well!

What makes an idol an idol? Notice that Jeremiah does not attribute any independent existence to the idol. What makes an idol an idol? Man does. You don't need a demonic being to have an idol. You don't need some exotic religious ideas to have an idol. All you need is something that really matters to you.

In the ancient world, people really wanted to have babies. Fertility is really important. Without babies, society will cease to exist. So gods and goddesses of fertility are all over the ancient world. Having rain at the right time – and not at the wrong time – is really important. So storm gods are common as well.

Notice also that idols are costly. Crafted wood, silver and gold, fashioned with care. After all, if it really matters to you, then you will pay dearly for it. You can easily see how science and technology have become essential to the idols of today. The way that we construct our idols has changed – but we still want power, pleasure, and peace. We still seek to manipulate our gods in order to get what we want. You can make anything into a god. What is it that you think will bring you happiness? What is it that you pour your time and money into? Where your treasure is – there will your heart be also.

b. The Stupidity of Idols vs. the Power of the LORD (v6-10)

Verses 6-10 then contrast the LORD with idols: We should fear the King of the nations – the one true God. Of course, the reason why we don't is because we prefer stupid gods. We want to be in control – and the true God is uncontrollable. A great and powerful God is only a comfortable thing if we could somehow control God.

C. S. Lewis helps us with his famous line – “of course he's not safe – but he's good.” The true God – the King of the nations – is great and powerful – you cannot control him. Rather, you should fear him. The fear of the LORD is a good thing. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. And when we say “fear” we really do mean “fear.” The LORD is great, and his name is great in might. He is not safe. You should fear him!

In contrast, the idols of the nations: 8 They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood! Notice again the theme of knowledge, instruction, learning. The idols of the nations are both stupid and foolish. Their instruction is but wood.

The stupidity of the idols should be clear from v9: 9 Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men. God made man in his own image. But man makes idols in his own image. There is a good use for wood and gold. You can use your skill – your craft – your wisdom – for the glory of God and the good of others. God made you for himself – and so the use of your skill and wisdom should reflect God's wisdom and love and justice. 10 But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.

The idols are made by skilled men – but they cannot speak or act. On the other hand, the earth quakes at the wrath of the LORD. In the same way, our idols are stupid. We trust in the work of our own hands to save us. I understand why. We can control the work of our own hands! We cannot control the true God! Of course, this trust in the work of our own hands is stupid. And our second point in verses 11-16 shows how the stupidity of idols becomes the stupidity of idolaters. Those who make idols become like them – so do all who trust in them.

2. Idolaters Are Stupid (v11-16)

a. The LORD Made the Heavens and the Earth (v11-13)

If the LORD made the heavens and the earth, that means that idols are all creatures – they are created things. They have no power – they have no wisdom – they are stupid. But the LORD made the earth by his power. He established the world by his wisdom. The LORD speaks and it happens. When God utters his voice, creation responds and obeys. And because this is the case:

b. The Stupidity of Every Adam (v14-15)

The word “man” in verse 14 is “adam” – and given the language of creation in this passage, it should make us think of creation and fall. God created Adam in his image.

And he breathed the breath of life into Adam. Now, every adam is trying to play god. Man is making his own image – the problem is that man is not God, and so there is no breath in the images that man makes.

The word “breath” is ruach – “wind, breath, spirit.” Man cannot breathe the breath of life into his idols. Sure, we can clone God’s work. We can mimic and imitate. But images made by man are lower than man – not higher! The creator is greater than his creature. Therefore, when we imitate God in creating things we are greater than our own creations. For this reason, when man makes an image and bows down to it – every man is stupid and without knowledge. Every man is stupid – every adam is brutish – like a beast and ignorant. We were created to worship and serve the living and true God. When we worship a creature instead of the Creator, we become less than man. We become a brute.

But there is another problem with idols. Idols are not just useless – they are “a work of delusion” – they lie and deceive and destroy: 15 They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish. Think about this: idols invariably fail us. “They suck the life and treasure out of a nation (the cost of idolatry is stupendous), but they always fail when you need them most. Idolatry is fundamentally a fool’s game, but we never learn until it is too late.” (Wright, 137) But verse 16 reminds us:

c. The LORD Our Portion Is NOT Like These (v16)

Notice how Jeremiah uses the language of inheritance in both ways: The LORD is the portion of Jacob. But Israel is the tribe of his inheritance! In other words, God himself is our portion. God himself is our inheritance. The Creator of all things is the portion of his people. The only inheritance that you can receive from a false god is death. And yet, in our stupidity, we run after the very things that we should have hated! That’s why Jeremiah concludes that even the Shepherds are Stupid.

3. The Shepherds Are Stupid (v17-25)

a. Therefore Exile Is Coming (v17-18)

In verses 17-18, the LORD says that he is “slinging out the inhabitants of the land” – he is bringing distress upon them, “that they may feel it.” We have often seen that Jeremiah blends his own voice with the voice of the LORD, both in his preaching and in his lamenting. We see that again in verses 19-21,

b. The LORD Grieves Over the Stupidity of the Shepherds (v19-21)

Verse 20 is probably referring to the temple as “my tent” (remembering the tabernacle). The nations have taken captive the people of God. And, most tragically of all, even the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the LORD Jeremiah counseled the last two kings of Judah to submit to Babylon. The first obeyed – and lived at the king’s table. The second refused – and the last thing he saw was his sons being killed before his eyes – before his eyes were plucked out!

c. Desolation from the North – for the Jew First and also for the Greek (v22-25)

Desolation comes against the cities of Judah from the north. Jeremiah had been told,

“Do not pray for this people.” So Jeremiah prays instead for himself: Jeremiah first acknowledges the sovereignty of God: 23 I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. You are not the master of your own life. You do not control your own destiny. Even from a human perspective we understand this: you cannot control what happens to you. You may be driving your own car – but someone else can run into you. You may choose a career path – but maybe no one will hire you.

If we recognize the sovereignty of God – that God is God – and we are not – then we will see that we do not control our lives. It is not in man to direct his steps. We need to listen to the LORD! 24 Correct me, O LORD, but in justice; not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. The LORD had told Jeremiah, not to pray for this people. So Jeremiah pleads only for himself! “Correct me, O LORD, but in justice – not in your anger, lest you bring me to nothing.” And Jeremiah asks God to bring judgment against the nations because of what they have done to Israel. 25 Pour out your wrath on the nations that know you not, and on the peoples that call not on your name, for they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him and consumed him, and have laid waste his habitation.

As we’ve seen throughout Jeremiah so far, there is very little hope yet for the Gentiles. But then again, there is very little hope for the Jews either! Our hope is that God has poured out his wrath on Jesus. When Jesus took our sin upon himself, Jesus became sin for us.

TEXT: Jeremiah 11:1-23

TITLE: *BROKEN COVENANT*

BIG IDEA:

PERSISTENT COVENANT BREAKING INVOKES GOD'S CURSE THAT BRINGS INESCAPABLE DISASTER

INTRODUCTION:

We live in a culture that has rejected God's Word; that worships the creature rather than the Creator; that has turned to idolatry and false religion; that has become corrupted in the depths of moral and sexual depravity; that mocks and opposes the true messengers of God; that lives in the stubbornness of their own wicked ways and refuses to submit to God's authority and commands. How did things turn out for God's covenant-breaking people back in the days of Jeremiah? What lessons can we apply to our times today? Do we think that we will escape the judgment of the Almighty God? How long before God says we have run out of rope and He will no longer make Himself available to respond to our cries for deliverance? Do not despise the patience of God. His forbearance will not continue on forever. The day of accountability is fast approaching.

PERSISTENT COVENANT BREAKING INVOKES GOD'S CURSE THAT BRINGS INESCAPABLE DISASTER

I. (:1-8) STUBBORN REBELLION IN PERSISTENTLY BREAKING GOD'S COVENANT DESERVES GOD'S CURSE

A. (:1-3a) Call to Attention

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 'Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel,'"

Importance of paying attention and heeding God's Word; don't overlook His warnings

Mackay: It is only as physical hearing is translated into obedient action that an individual or a nation finds satisfaction and self-fulfillment in living relationship with God himself.

B. (:3b-5a) Covenant Terms:

Cursing for Failure to Keep the Covenant vs. Blessing for Faithfulness

1. Cursing for Disobedience

"Cursed is the man who does not heed the words of this covenant which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace,"

Starts out by condemning disobedience in very strong terms; points back to His grace in the Exodus and the foundation of the covenant obligations

Wiersbe: The land of Egypt had been an “*iron furnace*” to Israel (Jer. 11:4), a place of suffering (**Deut. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Isa. 48:10**); but Canaan was “*a land flowing with milk and honey*” (**Jer. 11:5**), a place of prosperity and freedom. God described the Promised Land to Moses in this way (**Ex. 3:8, 17; see 33:3**), and Moses repeated this description to the people (**Lev. 20:24; Deut. 6:3; 11:9; 26:9, 15; 27:3; 31:20**). Sad to say, the nation preferred the fleshpots of Egypt to the milk and honey of Canaan (**Ex. 16:3; Num. 11:4-5**) and repeatedly wanted to go back to Egypt.

2. Blessing for Obedience

“saying, ‘Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you; so you shall be My people, and I will be your God,’ in order to confirm the oath which I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is this day.”

Opportunity for great blessing

Thompson: Judah needed to be recalled to the historic Sinai event when God promised to supply the material and spiritual needs of his people in their infancy as a nation, in return for their undivided worship and obedience. That way lay life. The way of disobedience was the way of death (cf. **Deut. 30:15-20**).

C. (:5) Covenant Ratification

“Then I answered and said, ‘Amen, O LORD.’”

Quite a strong affirmation on the part of Jeremiah (speaking for the nation) regarding promised obedience to God’s covenant requirements.

D. (:6-8) Condemnation for Covenant Breaking

1. (:6) Prophetic Charge to Proclaim the Covenant

“And the LORD said to me, ‘Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear the words of this covenant and do them.’”

We cannot just be hearers of the Word of God; we must be doers as well.

2. (:7) Persistent Warnings to Heed the Covenant

“For I solemnly warned your fathers in the day that I brought them up from the land of Egypt, even to this day, warning persistently, saying, ‘Listen to My voice.’”

No lack of warnings issued by God. Cursing for breaking the covenant should not be a surprise.

3. (:8a) Perverse Rebellion

“Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked, each one, in the stubbornness of his evil heart;”

What are our strategies and weapons for fighting against the stubbornness of our evil heart?

4. (:8b) Promised Judgment

“therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.”

II. (:9-14) SILENT RESPONSE TO THEIR CRIES FOR HELP BECAUSE OF THEIR STUBBORN CONSPIRACY

A. (:9-11) Conspiracy to Repeat the Same Sins Will Bring Disaster

1. (:9-10) Deja Vu

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors who refused to hear My words, and they have gone after other gods to serve them; the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers.’”

Ryken: What **John Calvin** said is true: The human heart is a factory for idols. Idols tend to multiply. They have short shelf lives. Worshiping a false god soon becomes tiresome or disappointing, and it is time to get another god.

The one thing all idols have in common is that they cannot offer salvation from God’s judgment. . .

Hard-heartedness, Idolatry, False worship. These were not just hairline fractures in the covenant – they were chasms.

2. (:11) Disaster Promised -- Without Escape

“Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Behold I am bringing disaster on them which they will not be able to escape; though they will cry to Me, yet I will not listen to them.’”

B. (:12-14) Closed Ears to Their Cries for Deliverance

1. (:12-13) No Response From Their False Gods

“Then the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they surely will not save them in the time of their disaster. For your gods are as many as your cities, O Judah; and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to the shameful thing, altars to burn incense to Baal.”

2. (:14) No Response From the One True God

“Therefore do not pray for this people, nor lift up a cry or prayer for them; for I will not listen when they call to Me because of their disaster.”

III. (:15-19) SCATHING REBUKE FOR WICKEDNESS, IDOLATRY AND CONSPIRACY

A. (:15) Contradiction Between Wickedness and Claims to Spirituality

“What right has My beloved in My house when she has done many vile deeds? Can the sacrificial flesh take away from you your disaster, so that you can rejoice?”

B. (:16-17) Contrast Between Gracious Calling of God and Spiritual Idolatry of His People

“The LORD called your name, ‘A green olive tree, beautiful in fruit and form’; With the noise of a great tumult He has kindled fire on it, And its branches are worthless. And the LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you because of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me by offering up sacrifices to Baal.”

Constable: Even though the Lord had compared His nation to a beautiful and fruitful green olive tree (cf. **Hosea 14:6; Psalm 52:8; Psalm 128:3**), He would burn it up in a great tumult because it had proved worthless as far as fulfilling His purpose for it (cf. **Jeremiah 21:14; Psalm 52:8; Psalm 80:16; Isaiah 27:11; Romans 11:17-24**). He would destroy the nation as He might destroy a tree by striking it with lightning. Quotes **Graybill**: "The olive [tree] was the source of oil for light, cooking, medicine, anointing for the body, and many other uses. It became the symbol of "prosperity and divine blessing, of beauty and strength." Thus it is here an apt picture of the Hebrew people, blessed by God, but now rejected."

Mackay: Instead of a fruitful olive tree we are left with the image of a lightning-struck tree, that still stands where it once did, but is now a shadow of its former self.

Wiersbe: God presented two pictures of His people that reveal how futile their religious faith really was: a worshiper in the temple (**11:15**) and a tree in the storm (**vv. 17-18**).

C. (:18-19) Conspiracy Against Jeremiah Revealed

“Moreover, the LORD made it known to me and I knew it; Then Thou didst show me their deeds.”

“But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; And I did not know that they had devised plots against me, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, And let us cut him off from the land of the living, That his name be remembered no more.’”

Parunak: Here for the first time we see a theme that becomes increasingly important as the book progresses: the personal threats to Jeremiah by the people around him because of his faithful presentation of the word of God.

Ryken: Why the conspiracy? The men of Anathoth did not like Jeremiah's preaching. They were not happy with his homiletics. . . it is not hard to guess why. Anathoth was a town of priests, and Jeremiah had some strong opinions about the priesthood. . . Not only did he criticize the priests, but he condemned the idol worship that made up such a large part of the economy. Jeremiah's reformation preaching threatened the whole religious, social, and economic structure of his hometown.

Mackay: The implication would be that they would cut off Jeremiah and suppress his message. He had no family, so "fruit" cannot refer to offspring. . . It was viewed as the ultimate ignominy if no one remembered your name (**Isa. 56:5**).

IV. (:20-23) SEVERE RETRIBUTION AGAINST THE OPPONENTS OF JEREMIAH

A. (:20) Cry for Vengeance

"But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, Who tries the feelings and the heart, Let me see Thy vengeance on them, For to Thee have I committed my cause."

Thompson: Threats from the men of Anathoth did not silence Jeremiah any more than a night in the stocks (**20:1-3**), or confinement in the cistern (**38:6**) or in the court of the guard (**38:13**). The call of God and the divine assurance of help was enough (**1:5-10**).

B. (:21-23) Certainty of Disaster for the Men of Anathoth Seeking Jeremiah's Death

"Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, saying, 'Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, that you might not die at our hand;' therefore, thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Behold, I am about to punish them! The young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters will die by famine; and a remnant will not be left to them, for I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth-- the year of their punishment.'"

Mackay: The men of Anathoth had rejected the prophetic warnings relayed by Jeremiah and in doing so they had revealed their hostility to the ultimate fact of human existence – that of accountability before God. The message presented to them was one which judged, and brought to an end, the religious and social consensus that prevailed at Jerusalem because it ran counter to the purposes of the Lord. When the Lord intervenes, it is more than a matter of extending protection and deliverance to his prophet. It is the vindication of the divine word that is his primary concern.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How quick are we to promise faithfulness and commitment to God's standards despite our history of failure and need for grace and forgiveness?
- 2) When will God have his fill of American apostasy and turn His back on our nation and no longer hear cries for deliverance?
- 3) When have you surprised by opposition on account of your spiritual service or biblical convictions?
- 4) What motivated Jeremiah to seek vengeance from God against his fellow countrymen?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

<http://www.wicwiki.org.uk>: Now you remember when God brought the children of Israel into the land, it was on a conditional basis. It was conditioned upon their obedience to God and to His commandments. So they were commanded when you come into the country, you take it over. There in the valley where Shechem is, there are two hills. One is Gerizim; one is Mount Ebal. And a part of the tribes were to... some of the men from the tribes were to stand on Mount Gerizim; others were to stand on Mount Ebal. And from Mount Ebal, they were to cry out the curses that would come upon the people if they disobeyed the covenant and the commandments of God.

"Cursed be he." And all the people down the valley, as these guys would yell out these various curses that would come upon those that turn from God, they would answer and respond, *"Amen, Amen."* And then from the other side at Gerizim, they pronounced the blessings. And, of course, these are found in Deuteronomy as God laid forth for them the covenant and, really, the conditions by which you will inherit this land. *"Blessed are they that obey the law of the Lord."* *"Amen, Amen."* *"Blessed are they that walk in His statutes. Blessed are they."* And so it must have been quite a scene as more than a million people gathered in the valley and these guys were calling down these curses and blessings, which were the basis, the covenant, the basis by which they were to inherit this land that God had promised unto Abraham.

Now God is officially declaring to them that they have broken that covenant.

Mackay: Being the divine spokesman to a spiritually hostile generation involves immense personal cost which can only be endured if there is close fellowship and personal trust between the messenger and the one who has commissioned him.

Bennett: Perhaps the major problem of this section, at least for commentators, is the meaning of the expression this covenant found in vv. 1, 6 and 8. Does the term refer to the covenant made under King Josiah (**2 Kings 23:1-3**) following the discovery of the book of the law (**2 Kings 22:8**) which added strength to Josiah's reforms, or is it a reference to the ancient Mosaic Covenant made at Sinai (**Ex. 19-24**)?

Much of the debate concerning this question seems unnecessary, for the two covenants are essentially the same. Deuteronomy contains the only extended exposition of Israel's covenant faith in the Old Testament. That faith goes back to and is grounded in the Exodus event, the holiest and most pivotal event in Israel's experience. It is reasonable to conclude then that the words this covenant refer to the Mosaic Covenant of Sinai, as renewed in 622 B.C. under the guidance of Deuteronomy and the leadership of Josiah.

<http://preachingsource.com/journal/jeremiah-outline-and-exposition/>

John MacArthur: [Overall survey of book of Jeremiah] –

Introduction:

Jeremiah is a prophet for a time like ours; same cycles repeated throughout human history; Naturalism dominates the thinking of our culture; no longer are we comfortable proclaiming that we are “a nation under God;” becoming a **nation of naturalists**; there is no God; nature is all there is; everything that exists is the product of unplanned, uncontrolled accidents; unconscious forces randomly mutating; mankind is the purposeless end of purposeless stream of events; rejection of God demanded by science and intellectualism; reaction against absolute truth; Product not of a love for freedom but of a love for iniquity; get rid of biblical morality with its consequences; nothing but hedonism

How can you look at what exists and not be in awe of the source of it?

How can we sin against the greatness of the Almighty?

Jer. 5:20ff – this sermon God gave to Jeremiah gives us a good insight into culture of his day and how it is similar to culture of our day – **vv.23-25** especially;

The Jews have looked at the majesty and providence of God as displayed in creation – it should have stirred up their hearts to worship; their wills do not submit to God; don't give him glory as Creator and Provider;

How can we contemplate this God and not turn to Him, and worship Him and obey Him?

Analogy in **vs. 22** – it is a fact that God controls the ocean with its boundaries and shores; However, on the contrary, **vs. 23**, this people will not be bound or stay within the confines of God's will and purpose; the sea tosses and turns but it is restrained by a little belt of sand; but people who have stronger restraints than sand are rebellious and overrun the borders God has established (His promises, covenants, threats, commands, etc.); man is hell-bent on revolt – that is how Jeremiah must see his people

Message of Jeremiah = the judgment that is coming – in his lifetime; A century earlier

Isaiah had said the same thing regarding Babylonian invasion and captivity; Jeremiah been a preacher for 42 years; during reign of 5 kings; superficial revival under Josiah – people’s response was shallow; Zedekiah was a vacillating weakling = last king of southern kingdom; Jeremiah’s message never changed; always the voice of God to his society; his preaching did not stop the slide or eliminate the judgment; he never saw any impact on a national level; he was faithful and despised; thrown into a pit to try to shut him up; we see no reversing of the direction of nation of United States; church is superficial and shallow and filled with self-gratification

How do we approach a nation on the brink of Judgment?

I. Jeremiah understood he had a **Divine Mission**

People calling for social and political action;

Jesus; “*my kingdom is not of this world*”

A. Predestined by God to Your Calling – chap. 1:5

Put in a unique place at a unique time to speak to God’s people

Jeremiah is very human; but that does not explain the power of his preaching and the extent of his faithfulness in spite of continual rejection

Too strong to yield or compromise

Powerful and loving personality

When there is a crisis people look for a program (something to fix the situation), but God looks for a Man or a Woman.

Most people in the church have no sense of overarching divine mission

B. Provided What he Needed by God

What am I going to say? God promised to give him the message

1:7 --

C. Protection from God – vs. 8

Despite constant pressure and opposition

Hard and discouraging 42 years – they hated what he said and hated him

Command = “*Fear not*” – confronting people with message they did not want to hear

D. Power from God – vs. 9-10

Words out of your mouth will shatter and build

We live in a culture on brink of divine judgment; on the brink of a Holocaust

Understand our Divine Mission

II. Characterized by a **Direct Message**

Didn’t pull any punches;

Didn’t try to make everyone happy; or making people feel good;

Preached against sin; indicted the nation categorically;

Accused them of being involved in false religion – turned to idols from the true God;

Hewed broken cisterns; rejected the fountainhead of life

Not a time for tolerance – expose false religion! We must confront lies;

Confront corrupt spiritual leadership – the corrupt infiltrators of the true religion;
3:24-25 – attacked general wickedness; whole society is immoral; sexual deviation;
5:1 – Aren't you weary of being lied to by people in power? Can you find one person who tells the truth??

11:8-10 – Rejection of Scripture – the Word of God –

Chap. 13 – visual aid – put on a pair of underpants – wear it and don't wash it; take that pair of shorts and go far away and hide it – bury it in the crevice of a rock (200 miles away); then instructed to go back and dig them up and retrieve them – disintegrated = the people of God – just kept getting more foul and corrupted
Sounds like our culture

III. Characterized by a **Deep Mourning**

Known as the weeping prophet; **13:17** – God wept thru the eyes of Jeremiah

Don't become indifferent or calloused;

Cf. Christ weeping over city of Jerusalem

Chap. 9 – calls for mourning women to mourn with him

Result: They did not Obey but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart --

Why do you do this if nobody listens?

24:4-7 Future Restoration for Remnant after Destruction and Purification in Captivity

Peter Wallace: The Covenant Broken

Jeremiah had been set “over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant”

(1:10) Here at the end of chapter 12, God shows Jeremiah a small part of what that means. God's purposes in his covenant were never just for Israel. The point of the covenant was always that all nations would be blessed in Abraham's seed.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves! In Jeremiah 11 we hear the curse of the Law. Paul speaks of this in Galatians 3:10 – “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.’” Galatians 3:10 is pretty much exactly what the LORD says to Jeremiah in verses 1-5:

1. Remember the Covenant with Your Fathers (v1-13)

a. Remember the Covenant – with Its Curses (v1-5)

Jeremiah starts with the words of the covenant. The language is drawn from the covenant curses in Deuteronomy 27. In Deuteronomy 27, Moses spoke of how Israel was going into a land flowing with milk and honey. And then Moses laid out a list of covenant curses upon those who broke God's law. And at the end of each curse, all the people shall say, “Amen.” And Jeremiah here takes the place of the people, answering, “Amen, LORD.”

Verse 5 reminds us of the “oath” that God “swore to your fathers.” God had made a promise to Abraham – and he confirmed it with an oath – Hebrews 6 points out that when God adds his oath to his promise, that means that there are now two unchangeable things (the promise and the oath) that guarantee “the unchangeable character of his purpose.” (Heb 6:17-18) So in the Abrahamic Covenant, God promises that he will give the promised land to the heirs of Abraham.

So then, what is the point of the Law? If God promised the Land to Abraham, what is the point of the covenant that God made with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt? Paul says that the Seed of Abraham is really Jesus (Gal. 3:16). “For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.” (Romans 4:13-14)

Hebrews 7 adds that the Levitical priesthood had to offer sacrifices daily precisely because their sacrifices could not actually remove sin. How do we know that their sacrifices could not remove sin? Because those priests kept dying. If your priests keep dying, then you know that their sacrifices are not working! Indeed, this is the point of the resurrection, according to Hebrews: Jesus “holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.” (Heb 7:24-25)

The earthly sanctuary and the earthly priesthood were “copies and shadows” of the heavenly. God gave the Law to Moses in order to show Israel a picture of his Kingdom. Hebrews 8 even quotes Jeremiah 31 on the importance of the New Covenant. The new covenant, Jeremiah says, is not like the covenant at Sinai. The covenant at Sinai depended on Israel’s performance, as you see in Jeremiah 11:4-5: “Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. So you shall be my people, and I will be your God, that I may confirm the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day.” (11:4-5)

Jeremiah hears this and replies, “So be it, LORD” – Amen – that’s what you told us! Some people have commented on this that this sounds like the Covenant of Works, where Adam could only obtain life through perfect, perpetual obedience. And there is certainly a clear parallel. Israel was called to succeed where Adam had failed. Israel enters the promised land – a land flowing with milk and honey – Paradise restored! We have already seen in Jeremiah the echoes of Adam and Eve – when God spoke in 4:23 about how he would return the creation to a barren wasteland (“tohu vbohu”).

But the Mosaic Covenant is not a republication of the covenant of works. After all, at the heart of the Mosaic Covenant are the words, “when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace.” At the heart of the Mosaic Covenant is grace. But while there is grace in the Mosaic Covenant, the grace of the Mosaic Covenant was not very effective! Again, Hebrews is helpful (7:18-19): The Mosaic law was “weak and

useless” (for the law made nothing perfect). And Christ has obtained a better ministry than the priests of the OT, “as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.” (8:6) The Law describes the way that we ought to live – but the Law does not give the power to obey! Think about how Jeremiah says this in verses 6-8:

b. Remember How Your Fathers Did Not Obey – in Spite of Warnings (v6-8)

God gave Israel the covenant curses so that they might see what sin deserves. The problem with Israel was that “everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart.” And yes, there was grace in the Mosaic Covenant – but the grace of the Mosaic Covenant was largely external: “I brought them up out of the land of Egypt” – that’s great, but it doesn’t change your heart! “I warned them, ‘Obey my voice’” – but that doesn’t change your heart! The Law tells you to obey. But the Law does not give you the power to obey! And you see the effect in verses 9-10: 4

c. They Have Broken My Covenant – the Conspiracy of Idolaters (v9-10)

God had said that Israel should love and serve him alone. But instead, they have gone after other gods to serve them. They have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers. God’s covenant in Deuteronomy followed the basic pattern of Ancient Near Eastern treaties. The Great King establishes his covenant with his vassal states. They have certain obligations. If they keep the covenant, then he will do all sorts of good things for them. If they break the covenant, then he will do all sorts of bad things to them! God had established his covenant as the Great King over Israel. But Israel has broken the covenant.

Indeed, God declares that this is a long-standing conspiracy against him. In other words, there’s a pattern here. In the days of the Judges, Israel broke covenant and served idols. And so God handed them over to their enemies. But they cried out to the LORD, and he saved them – finally raising up David to deliver them. But in the days of the Kings, the Kingdom divided, and the northern kingdom of Israel broke covenant and served idols. And so God handed them over to their enemies and destroyed them.

By Jeremiah’s day, there had been no Kingdom of Israel for over a hundred years. And now, Judah has “turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them.” And God says, “Methinks I see a conspiracy!” The pattern has become too clear! Therefore...

d. “Therefore...I Am Bringing Disaster upon Them” (v11-13)

If you reject the LORD your God and turn to serve other gods, then you will be destroyed. In the past, when Israel cried out to the LORD, God heard them and delivered them. But this time, “Though they cry to me, I will not listen to them.” Let them cry out to the gods in whom they trust! You need to hear this! Idolatry is no different today! We put our hope for happiness in our husband or wife. What others think of us matters more than what God thinks of us. We trust in medical technology to save us. If you want to know what your idols are, watch your time and your money – what are you spending money on? What do you spend time doing? What really matters

to you? False gods promise life, happiness, peace – riches. But false gods only deliver death, misery, conflict, poverty, and disaster. If you continue to pursue your idols, then there may come a time when God will say, “okay, fine – cry out to your gods to whom you make offerings – see if they will save you in your time of trouble!” There will come a time when your spouse fails you. There will come a time when medical technology cannot save you. There will come a time when all that you trusted comes crashing down around you. And worst of all, God says that in that time, he will not listen – and so he tells Jeremiah “do not pray for this people”!

2. “Do Not Pray for This People”: The Burning of the Green Olive Tree (v14-17)

a. Do Not Pray for This People – Not Even Sacrifice Can Save Them (v14-15)

Here the LORD identifies Jerusalem – the Church – as his Bride. And he says that she has done so many vile deeds that no amount of sacrifice can atone for her sins. As Hebrews 10:3-4 puts it, 6 “But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” Sacrificial flesh doesn’t actually work! If you reject the LORD, if you turn away from the living God, then there is no sacrifice for sin. As Hebrews 10:26 puts it, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” If you will not accept the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf, then there is no sacrifice for sin. If you willfully, permanently, and finally reject the sacrifice of Jesus, then all that is left is idolatry – and idols cannot save you! And Jeremiah says regarding Israel:

b. Baal-Worship Has Resulted in the Burning of the Green Olive Tree (v16-17)

Here, Jeremiah switches the image from the Bride to the Tree. In Hosea 14:6 – a passage that Andrew Deliyannides has taught us to love – the LORD described Israel: “his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.” Before Hosea, David had said, “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.” (Ps 52:8) The LORD of hosts had planted Israel as a beautiful green olive tree. But when the people of God turn to others gods – when Israel made offerings to Baal – they provoked the LORD to anger. And now the olive tree is being burned to the ground. There is a very simple structure to what Jeremiah has said: First, scripture says if you do X, then God will do Y. Second, this is what you have done: you have done X – over and over and over. And so therefore, God is now going to do Y. 7 And this was not a popular thing to say in Judah! Especially after all of Josiah’s reforms! Judah is doing better at following the LORD than ever before! But Jeremiah’s assault on the kings and priests and prophets results in a conspiracy against him.

3. The Prophet as Case Study (v18-23)

a. “Like a Lamb to the Slaughter” – They Seek to Destroy the Tree (v18-20)

God has just said that sacrificial flesh cannot avert Jerusalem’s doom. And yet now the prophet is becoming a sacrificial victim – like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. There is a lot of language the reminds us of Isaiah 52-53. Before anyone ever applied the Servant Songs to Jesus, Jeremiah had appropriated some of its language to himself. But Jeremiah didn’t even realize that there was a plot against him – until the LORD himself

made it known to Jeremiah. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” The prophet is now the tree – the prophet is a picture of Israel (the green olive tree). And now, the people of Israel are trying to destroy the picture of Israel (the prophet).

And in verse 20, we hear Jeremiah’s appeal to the LORD: 20 But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause. He entrusted himself to him who judges justly! Jeremiah (perhaps unwittingly) is becoming a picture of Jesus! And so Jeremiah asks God to show him his vengeance! Jeremiah understands that we should not take vengeance for ourselves. “Vengeance is mine,” says the LORD, “I will repay.” 8 But that doesn’t mean that vengeance is bad. After all, if vengeance belongs to God, then it is a good thing when God takes vengeance upon the wicked! And God says that he will bring judgment against those who conspire against his prophet:

b. The LORD’s Warning to Those Who Conspire against His Prophet (v21-23)

Here we discover more details of the plot: The men of Anathoth – Jeremiah’s home town – were plotting against him. Their objection to him is that he is prophesying in the name of the LORD. It’s not hard to understand why. The priests and rulers of Judah were convinced that Josiah’s reforms had worked. We have reformed the sacrificial system. We are back to doing what God told us to do. We’re doing what God told us – therefore you are a false prophet! And, since we are following God’s law, you must die!

You do realize that this was always the drawback to the law that said that false prophets should be executed! If the “bad guys” hold power, then they can use the Law to execute true prophets – because the royal/temple interpretation of the Law says that we’re doing fine. You disagree – therefore, you are speaking against the Law! This is why the Church always needs to be careful not to “silence” prophets. There’s a pit on either side! If you follow every wind and tide – you’ll wind up wrecked on one side – but if you insist that “we will never change” – you’ll crash on the other side!

Rome’s biggest error was in saying that the Church could never err. That forced Rome to condemn Luther and Calvin as heretics. On the other hand, the mainline Presbyterian Church has allowed people to say anything, which has resulted in moral anarchy and chaos! Jeremiah sees the same sort of thing happening in his day, and so in chapter 12, he responds to this.

In verses 1-4 he brings his complaint to God in the form of two questions: 1) Why does the way of the wicked prosper? And 2) How long will the land mourn?

4. Jeremiah’s Complaint/God’s Answer (12:1-17)

a. Why Does the Wicked Prosper? How Long Will the Land Mourn? (12:1-4)

The basic point of Jeremiah’s complaint seems to be, “Okay, all this makes sense. Your covenant has been broken. You are just, and so you will bring vengeance upon the wicked.” But you, O LORD, know me; you see me, and test my heart toward you. If I

exist, a righteous, faithful remnant that believes and follows you, then how come the treacherous thrive? Why is your Law not working? It's all very nice and good to say that God will make all things right in the end, but I want to know why is God not making everything right now! God's answer could not have been very comforting: First,

b. God's Answer (12:5-17)

1) It's Worse Than You Think! (v5-6)

You think this is bad, Jeremiah, just you wait! You thought it was bad when the men of Anathoth conspired against you – well, it's going to get worse: Even your family will betray you. If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? But do not think for a moment that God is just a detached observer. He is not a cosmic sadist – watching our misery for his good pleasure!

2) The Desolation of God's House (v7-13)

What does a lion in the forest do – when she “lifts up her voice against me”? When does a lion roar? Lions do not roar before they pounce. Lions are silent stalkers. They only lift up their voice after they have subdued their prey! God has been mauled by his people! You – and I – mauled God. Our sin sent Jesus to the cross. WE might as well have been the ones who spit on him, beat him, and hammered the nails into his hands! “Therefore I hate her.” Wait. God hates us? Yes, he cannot help but hate us! For we have sinned. But doesn't God love us? Yes, but that is why he must also hate us. For we have sinned. He loves the good that he created. And therefore he hates that which has marred his good creation. But take heart, for if God only hates us because he loves what he made us to be, then we can trust him to do what it takes to remove the evil. Indeed, only a love so deep that it is willing to hate is worthy of being called love!

I knew a man who did not seem to care that his wife had cheated on him. That man did not love his wife. A man who loves his wife will hate her for cheating on him. Only such a man will be able to bear the cross needed to restore the marriage! But notice also that the LORD is concerned not only for his human creation. All creation groans when humanity fails – and God grieves for the ecological effects of man's sin!

Yes, all this language circles around man – around Israel – but it is this sort of language that will drive Paul to say that the creation itself groans, eagerly awaiting the revelation of the Sons of God. And that's where Jeremiah brings us in the shocking conclusion in verses 14-17:

3) But I Will Have Compassion in the End (v14-17)

We might expect God to say something about how he will restore Israel. But instead, the LORD says that any nation that will “diligently learn the ways of my people,” will be “built up in the midst of my people.” If God's people act like the nations, then they will be destroyed. If the nations act like God's people, then they will be saved. No, we're not yet fully to the New Covenant yet! For that to happen, the Word must become flesh and dwell among us! We need God to write his law on our hearts so that grace becomes something that God does in us. But the principles are in place. “For while we

still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5)

TEXT: Jeremiah 12:1-17

TITLE: *RUNNING WITH THOROUGHBREDS AND FULFILLING OUR MINISTRY CALLING*

BIG IDEA:
DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT PUSHES MINISTERS TO PERSEVERE IN FULFILLING THEIR CALLING

INTRODUCTION:

Since today marks the 145th running of the historic Kentucky Derby, it is appropriate that our text directs our attention to what it takes to **run with thoroughbreds**. Jeremiah was tempted to throw in the towel and drop out of the race (= his ministry calling). He was not seeing any tangible results for faithfulness in preaching his confrontational message. Instead even his family and fellow countrymen were conspiring to put him to death. God wanted to encourage his prophet to persevere and set his sights on the finish line rather than wallow in self-pity due to the difficulties of the present.

DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT PUSHES MINISTERS TO PERSEVERE IN FULFILLING THEIR CALLING

You must see yourself as a minister (*small m* in the context of the priesthood of all believers equipped with a spiritual gift) with a ministry calling in order to relate to this text so that you can receive the divine encouragement that God has for you. We are all tempted to throw in the towel; to question whether our labor in the Lord is in vain.

I. (:1-4) NEED FOR DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT -- PERPLEXITIES OF VINDICATION GIVE RISE TO SEARCHING QUESTIONS

A. (:1a) Starting Point = God is Fair

“Righteous art Thou, O LORD, that I would plead my case with Thee; Indeed I would discuss matters of justice with Thee.”

Most of our questions about how God treats us vs. how God treats others come back to the concept of the righteousness and justice of God. Can we trust Him to really be fair?

Right view of God is always the best starting point when in times of perplexity.

B. (:1b) Searching Question #1 – Why Do the Wicked Prosper?

*“Why has the way of the wicked prospered?
Why are all those who deal in treachery at ease?”*

Many bible passages deal with this age-old question:

- **Job 12:6; 21:7-15**
- **Psalms 37; 73**
- **Hab. 1:12-17**

Mackay: Arising out of the startling impact of the revelation of the plot against his life, Jeremiah has been led to meditate, as many others have before and since, about the fairness of life and the apparent anomalies in God's providential dealings. Although expressed as a complaint regarding the prosperity of the wicked, the underlying counter-motif is the treatment accorded the prophet. Jeremiah is particularly perplexed because he cannot see how to reconcile the success the wicked enjoy with his belief in the goodness of God. "Why does this happen?" is the anguished plea that he sets out before the Lord. But we must notice that it is before God he brings it. His faith is such that he is not driven to despair, but to ask deep questions about the way God orders events in this life, in particular why he has not acted to vindicate the message he has given to his messenger.

Kidner: This is one of many cries of "Why?" and "How Long?" in the Old Testament – to which God's answer is never philosophical, as though he owed us explanations, but always pastoral, to rebuke us, re-orientate us or reassure us.

C. (:2-3) Summary Distinction

1. (:2) Ungrateful and Hypocritical Pagan Nations

*"Thou hast planted them, they have also taken root;
They grow, they have even produced fruit.
Thou art near to their lips But far from their mind."*

Guzik: The people Jeremiah had in mind were those who made an outward profession of religion but did not really care about God and the things of God.

2. (:3a) Grateful and Transparent Prophet of God

*"But Thou knowest me, O LORD; Thou seest me;
And Thou dost examine my heart's attitude toward Thee."*

3. (:3b) Reversal of Analogy of Sheep for the Slaughter

*"Drag them off like sheep for the slaughter
And set them apart for a day of carnage!"*

Remember how this analogy had been applied to Jeremiah in **11:19**.

Constable: The Lord knew that Jeremiah's attitude toward Him was entirely different than those hypocrites. The prophet prayed that the Lord would drag them off to punishment like sheep going to the slaughter (cf. **Jeremiah 11:19**). He prayed that God would reserve them for special destruction, as He had set Jeremiah apart for his ministry (**Jeremiah 1:5**).

D. (:4) Searching Question #2 – How Long Before God Makes Things Right?

*"How long is the land to mourn And the vegetation of the countryside to wither?
For the wickedness of those who dwell in it, Animals and birds have been
snatched away, Because men have said, 'He will not see our latter ending.'"*

II. (:5-6) CHALLENGE OF DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT -- PRINCIPLES OF EXHORTATION TO PREPARE JEREMIAH FOR EVEN HARDER TIMES AHEAD

A. (:5) Principle #1 – Failing Easy Tests Makes It Impossible to Pass Harder Tests

*“If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, Then how can you compete with horses?
If you fall down in a land of peace, How will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?”*

Contrast between foot soldier and calvary

Mackay: In vv. 5-6 we have the first part of the divine response to Jeremiah’s complaint. God does not explain the workings of his providence; nor does he seek to cheer up the prophet by pointing to some set of good times to come. Instead his words are brusque and challenging. This perhaps permits us to gauge how Jeremiah’s complaint ought to be read in this context. He has been speaking in a voice of self-pity at the hardship he has sustained and the trials he is having to undergo in the discharge of his divine commission. The Lord is warning him that he has not yet experienced anything very much at all. . .

The response of vv. 5-6 does not directly address the questions posed by the prophet regarding the good fortune of the wicked and the hard time endured by those who are loyal to the Lord. It would seem that the Lord is saying that loyalty to him is its own reward. Those who are granted the privilege of serving the king have to do so without having revealed to them all the counsel of the king. Often they have to live with perplexing problems and open opposition. What they are called on to do is to maintain their obedience to their God despite the puzzles that the circumstances of life frequently set for them. Notwithstanding their lack of comprehension they are to struggle to remain faithful and rely on the provision of the one who had promised his presence would be with them (1:19).

Wiersbe: The easy life is ultimately the hard life, because the easy life stifles maturity, but the difficult life challenges us to develop our spiritual muscles' and accomplish more for the Lord.

Constable: The Lord replied by asking Jeremiah how he expected to be able to endure the rigors of coming antagonism if the present hostility he was experiencing wore him out (cf. **Jeremiah 11:19; Jeremiah 11:21; Jeremiah 23:21**). If he fell in a relatively peaceful environment, how could he get through the turbulence to come, which resembled the violent, overflowing Jordan River in the spring. The Jordan Valley was a sub-tropical jungle, inhabited by lions, that was hard to penetrate at any season of the year (cf. **Jeremiah 49:19; Jeremiah 50:44; 2 Kings 6:2**).

Ryken: If Jeremiah thought he had trouble today, he needed to wait until tomorrow.

Anyone who gets discouraged, downtrodden, and defeated over little things will never fulfill his divine calling. If even little disappointments tempt Jeremiah to leave his calling, how will he cope with real persecution? God had great things in store for Jeremiah. But he would never achieve them unless he was willing to persevere in the little things. . . (Is. 40:28-31) – The Lord gives the strength to keep pace.

B. (:6) Principle #2 – Flattery of Family and Friends Can Hide Evil Intentions

*“For even your brothers and the household of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you, even they have cried aloud after you.
Do not believe them, although they may say nice things to you.”*

III. (:7-13) BACKDROP FOR DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT -- PICTURES OF DESOLATION FOR GOD’S INHERITANCE INDICATE HARD TIMES ARE REAL AND PAINFUL

A. (:7-9) Pictures of Desolation Resulting from Opposition

1. (:7) Lament of the Lord – Abandonment of Inheritance

*“I have forsaken My house,
I have abandoned My inheritance;
I have given the beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies.”*

God is pointing out to Jeremiah the parallel nature of their concerns; God has a lament to raise as well – but on a higher level; how could He have graciously provided everything to the nations and then be spurned and even opposed? Takes a lot for God to portray Himself as the one abandoning his people.

Longman: God turns from Jeremiah’s situation with his own family to God’s own situation with the people. Just like those who should love and trust Jeremiah have determined to hurt him, so the same is true of Yahweh’s people.

2. (:8) Roaring Lion

*“My inheritance has become to Me Like a lion in the forest;
She has roared against Me;
Therefore I have come to hate her.”*

Parunak: Judah is a wild beast provoking the Lord, a lion in the forest roaring as it attacks him. His destruction of them is simply the expected result of this provocation.

Ryken: Jeremiah does not mean “hate” in the sense of a violent, angry emotion. What it means is that God intended to perform an act of rejecting his people, at least for a time. He was going to disinherit them.

3. (:9) Speckled Bird

*“Is My inheritance like a speckled bird of prey to Me?
Are the birds of prey against her on every side?
Go, gather all the beasts of the field, Bring them to devour!”*

Parunak: Judah is a bird of prey, attacked by her peers. As a "*speckled bird*," she looks strange and foreign to them, so they attack her. "*Come ye ...*" is what the other birds cry out to the beasts of the field, summoning them against Judah. Thus we continue with the notion of Judah as an aggressive animal of prey, but now even the other animals in the forest have marshalled themselves against her.

Merrill Unger: The "*speckled bird*" represents a blending together of worship of the true God of heaven with pagan idolatry, so the neighboring nations were ready to pounce upon her in her sinful assimilation to their idolatry.

Ryken: The Jews were like the speckled bird. They were different. They stood out among the nations, perhaps because God's favor rested upon them. So the other nations will move in for the kill, like wild beasts who come and devour. Reluctantly God will let them attack, because his inheritance has become like a lion in the forest.

B. (:10-11) Pictures of Desolation Resulting from Neglect

1. (:10) Unfaithful Shepherds

*"Many shepherds have ruined My vineyard,
They have trampled down My field;
They have made My pleasant field A desolate wilderness."*

Constable: Many of the foreign kings had ruined the Lord's people, like unfaithful shepherds sometimes ruined a vineyard. They had trodden the people down so that they had become as unproductive as a wilderness, completely desolate. Furthermore, Judeans did not express enough concern to do something about the situation; they failed to repent.

Mackay: Though "*shepherds*" coupled with a past translation may refer to Judah's rulers (**2:8**) who have wasted the land with their imprudent actions, it is more probable that the phrase points to the leaders of the invading armies (**6:3: 25:34-36**). It is a figure of more organized and concerted action against the land than that of **Ps. 80:13**.

2. (:11) Uncaring People

*"It has been made a desolation, Desolate, it mourns before Me;
The whole land has been made desolate, Because no man lays it to
heart."*

Parunak: Judah is a vineyard, trodden down by careless shepherds. If you've ever had a garden, you know how destructive animals can be when they get into it. Imagine rabbits eating your lettuce, or turtles munching on the tomatoes. It's even worse when a whole flock of sheep comes through, trampling everything under foot. Here Judah is portrayed as a vineyard (cf. **Isa. 5**), and careless shepherds have allowed their flocks to ravage it. Cf. **Ezek. 34** for further indictments of the shepherds, the civil leaders of Judah at this period. They allow the godless to trample down those who truly are God's portion and heritage.

C. (:12-13) Pictures of Desolation Resulting from God's Wrath Like a Destroying Harvest

1. (:12) The Sword of the Lord

*“On all the bare heights in the wilderness Destroyers have come,
For a sword of the LORD is devouring from one end of the land even to
the other;
There is no peace for anyone.”*

Parunak: the "high places" (lit. caravan paths) in the wilderness

2. (:13) Harvest of Thorns

*“They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns,
They have strained themselves to no profit.
But be ashamed of your harvest because of the fierce anger of the
LORD.”*

IV. (:14-17) VISION FOR DIVINE ENCOURAGEMENT -- PROMISE OF RESTORATION TO NATIONS IF THEY WOULD REPENT = VISION OF PARADISE RESTORED

A. (:14-15) Process of Uprooting and Restoration

1. (:14) Process of Uprooting

a. Uprooting of Wicked Nations from Their Lands

*“Thus says the LORD concerning all My wicked neighbors who
strike at the inheritance with which I have endowed My people
Israel, ‘Behold I am about to uproot them from their land’*

Thompson: The wicked neighbors would include all those who at some time spoiled the land that Yahweh had given to his people. Among these were the Egyptians, Assyrians, Edomites, Moabites, Amorites, Arameans, and Babylonians.

b. Uprooting of Judah From Captivity to Return to Promised Land

“and will uproot the house of Judah from among them.”

2. (:15) Process of Restoration of Nations to Their Lands

*“And it will come about that after I have uprooted them, I will again
have compassion on them; and I will bring them back, each one to his
inheritance and each one to his land.”*

B. (:16-17) Potential for Prosperity or Destruction

1. (:16) Obedience Leads to Prosperity

*“Then it will come about that if they will really learn the ways of My
people, to swear by My name, ‘As the LORD lives,’ even as they taught
My people to swear by Baal, then they will be built up in the midst of My
people.”*

No accommodation for religious pluralism

2. (:17) Rebellion Leads to Destruction

“But if they will not listen, then I will uproot that nation, uproot and destroy it,’ declares the LORD.”

Parunak: This is a common prophetic motif; cf. **Isa. 10:5-19**. God may use a pagan nation to punish his people, but that pagan nation will itself be judged for its savagery. God may chastise his people severely, but he will ultimately restore them to himself.

Feinberg: In this section we have an anticipation of the prophecies in chapters **47-49**. In prophesying to the nations, Jeremiah was fulfilling his commission (**1:10**). The nations (Syria, Moab, Ammon) were to be punished by the same enemy that punished Judah, namely, Babylon. . . A millennial setting is in view in **vv. 15-16**. Repatriation is promised for Israel and the nations, who have learned of God from his people, just as Israel formerly learned the worship of idols through these nations. Notice that the basis of the predicted blessing is repentance and faith. If the pagans adopt the worship of God in truth, they will be incorporated into God’s people. Israel will lead in godliness as she formerly did in idolatry. There will be a remnant among the nations (cf. **Gen 12:1-3; Rom 11:15**). But the members of the remnant will have to make a genuine avowal of God as their own (cf. **4:2**). Then the nations with Israel will know peace in the Messianic Age. When they were in the midst of the nations (**vv. 7, 9**), it was to God’s people’s detriment; when the nations are in the midst of God’s people, it will be to the nations’ spiritual blessing. The chapter closes with the alternative to faith and is a warning to all (**v. 17**). For unbelief there will be doom. Here, as always, prophecy is ethically conditioned.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When are you tempted to question the fairness of God with respect to how you are being treated in life?
- 2) How has God encouraged you in this area of perseverance in Christian ministry?
- 3) Where have you encountered unexpected resistance and opposition and how did you respond? What is an adversary in your life?
- 4) Does your vision of future restoration include God’s role for redeemed pagan nations?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thompson: In **12:1-6** we have one of Jeremiah's "confessions," – a brief self-revelation in which a man lays bare some of his own deep questionings and intimate feelings. Here he speaks in his own name. The *I* is not Yahweh, as in the oracles, but the prophet himself in soliloquy.

Ryken: Not every promise of the Old Testament was completely fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ. Many of the promises of Scripture spill over beyond the first coming of Jesus and shine onto his Second Coming. When the screen of the life of Jesus Christ is removed, a Biblical prophecy shines against the backdrop of the end of human history.

These three stages of the fulfillment of a Biblical prophecy can be called literal fulfillment, messianic fulfillment, and eschatological fulfillment.

Hal Brunson: (12:5) - Footmen and Horses: Adversaries and Adversity

Historical Context: Footmen relate to Scythian enemies from the North and the horses relate to the invasion by the Babylonians. Transgression of the Sabbath was one of the great sins of the nation. Test of impending military invasion.

Images of **Speed** (pace of life – all types of increasing demands on your life) and **Acceleration**

Things are bad and are going to get worse;

Church should not be a place of busyness .. but oasis of quiet and rest

John Piper: What is a right way to complain to God? (12:1)

Many times we are perplexed by the providences of God.

Addresses YAHWEH = the covenant God; I AM WHO I AM; not some distant deity;

"*Complain*" in English implies some level of frustration or anger;

Starts with absolute truth that God is always right – not evil or guilty or wrong

Not questioning God's integrity in any way;

Expresses his perplexity and asks for insight;

When you are at a loss and perplexed and baffled, come to God as your redeeming, saving God – don't stand outside as if you are going to be the judge and assess his righteousness;

Plead for light, insight, wisdom

Jack Wald: Run with the Horses

Frederick Buechner writes about him in this way:

The word *jeremiah* means a doleful and thunderous denunciation, and its derivation is no mystery. There was nothing in need of denunciation that Jeremiah didn't denounce. He denounced the king and the clergy. He denounced recreational sex and extramarital jamborees. He denounced the rich for exploiting the poor, and he denounced the poor

for deserving no better. He denounced the way every new god that came sniffing around had them all after him like so many bitches in heat; and right at the very gates of the Temple he told them that if they thought God was impressed by all the mumbo-jumbo that went on there, they ought to have their heads examined. . .

At a young age, Jeremiah was given a huge responsibility and this incident early on in his ministry was a critical moment for him. He had worked to promote the reforms of Josiah and offended the people from his own town who did not want their local shrines to be torn down. They threatened his life and now what will he do?

Eugene Peterson talks about this in his book, Run with the Horses.

Life is difficult, Jeremiah. Are you going to quit at the first wave of opposition? Are you going to retreat when you find that there is more to life than finding three meals a day and a dry place to sleep at night? Are you going to run home the minute you find that the mass of men and women are more interested in keeping their feet warm than in living at risk to the glory of God? Are you going to live cautiously or courageously? I called you to live at your best, to pursue righteousness, to sustain a drive toward excellence. It is easier, I know, to be neurotic. It is easier to be parasitic. It is easier to relax in the embracing arms of the Average. Easier, but not better. Easier, but not more significant. Easier, but not more fulfilling. I called you to a life of purpose far beyond what you think yourself capable of living and promised you adequate strength to fulfill your destiny. Now at the first sign of difficulty you are ready to quit. If you are fatigued by this run-of-the-mill crowd of apathetic mediocrities, what will you do when the real race starts, the race with the swift and determined horses of excellence? What is it you really want, Jeremiah, do you want to shuffle along with the crowd, or run with the horses?

TEXT: Jeremiah 13:1-27

TITLE: PRIDE BROUGHT LOW

BIG IDEA:

PRIDE PERVERTS PRIVILEGED POSITION INTO THE SHAME AND HUMILIATION OF DEGRADING DOMINATION

INTRODUCTION:

We are all familiar with the axiom: *Pride goes before a Fall*; but when the privileged position and potential to be what God has created you to be is so great, the corresponding Fall sinks you to extreme depths. Such is the case here for the people and the leaders and the city of the Jews. They persisted in their arrogance and their idolatry and their assimilation of the sinful practices of the wicked nations around them to such an extent that God was forced to drive them into exile – away from the Promised Land – to deal severely with their unfaithfulness. They thought they were choosing a life of freedom and pleasure; but they ended up consigned to slavery and suffering. And still they lacked the perception to understand where they went wrong and how these troubles could be engulfing them.

PRIDE PERVERTS PRIVILEGED POSITION INTO THE SHAME AND HUMILIATION OF DEGRADING DOMINATION

I. (:1-11) METAPHOR OF LINEN BELT – FROM PRIVILEGE TO PUTRIFICATION – THE BEST BECAME THE WORST -- GOD’S CHOSEN PEOPLE HAVE PROVEN TO BE WORTHLESS AND WORTHY OF DESTRUCTION BECAUSE OF THEIR PRIDE AND IDOLATRY

A. (:1-7) The Commanded Actions

1. (:1-2) Command to Buy, Wear and Not Wash the Belt (or Girdle)

a. (:1) Command

“Thus the LORD said to me, ‘Go and buy yourself a linen waistband, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water.’”

Key instruction: do not wash it

Peter Hoytema: Linen was the fabric of clothing worn by the priests. **Ex. 28:2** -- It was a symbol of what God called his people to be. What was true of the priests’ clothing was supposed to be true of every aspect of life in the community of faith. Everyone was to be fully devoted to God, each one pursuing a common mission statement: *for glory and for beauty*.

A. F. Muir: represented, therefore, the idea of consecration arising from nearness and closeness. They were highly favored amongst the nations as being brought into immediate relation with Jehovah.

b. (:2) Action

“So I bought the waistband in accordance with the word of the LORD and put it around my waist.”

2. (:3-5) Command to Hide the Belt

a. (:3-4) Command

“Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, ‘Take the waistband that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a crevice of the rock.’”

Adam Clarke: The scene of hiding the girdle being laid near the Euphrates, intimated that the scene of the nation's distress should be Chaldea, which that river waters . . . Intending to point out, by this distant place, the country into which they were to be carried away captive.

Peter Hoytema: The people called to be set apart from all the other nations of the world intermingled with them. The men of Israel took foreign wives, and the people called to be dedicated to God alone worshiped foreign gods. Soon, the kingdom was divided, and rulers in both Israel and Judah turned their backs on God by making political alliances with the surrounding nations. Even the priests became corrupt. They perverted justice by taking bribes and by neglecting the poor. There may have been lots of religious activity in the land, but it was all empty formalism—all show with no substance. . .

When people see you, what do they see? Do they see a beautifully adorned and skillfully crafted tapestry graciously woven by God? Or do they see something else—something tattered and frayed by your rebellion against God, a once beautiful garment now rendered useless by a stubborn heart?

b. (:5) Action

“So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD had commanded me.”

3. (:6-7) Command to Retrieve the Hidden Belt

a. (:6) Command

“And it came about after many days that the LORD said to me, ‘Arise, go to the Euphrates and take from there the waistband which I commanded you to hide there.’”

b. (:7) Action

“Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and I took the waistband

from the place where I had hidden it; and lo, the waistband was ruined, it was totally worthless.”

All rotted out and moldy; no longer something that you would want close to your body

Mackay: it is not the people who are going to be ruined by the Exile, but their pride (v. 9). The nation had despised the special status accorded to them by God and had become superior in their own esteem. They should have functioned as a linen belt, an ornament bringing renown to the Lord (cf. **Deut. 4:5-8**). However, their disobedience and spiritual impurity showed that they had failed in the mission assigned them, and they had become in God’s sight like a cast-off garment. In many ways the Exile was a restorative influence for the people, but only after what blocked a right relationship with the Lord was removed. The message being conveyed was that what was going to come upon the nation would remove from them that outlook which was preventing them from giving due acknowledgment to their covenant Overlord.

B. (:8-11) The Condemning Application

1. (:8-9) Conclusion: Root Sin of Pride = Cause for Destruction

“Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Thus says the LORD, ‘Just so will I destroy the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.’”

2. (:10) Color Commentary – Rebellion Renders the Wicked Worthless

“This wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts and have gone after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them, let them be just like this waistband, which is totally worthless.”

Parunak: the people is "evil," contaminated with disobedience, self-reliance, and idolatry. Perhaps this reflects the unwashed nature of the loincloth.

Constable: The people of Judah, pure and untarnished at the time of their call (**Jeremiah 2:2-3**), would be just as worthless as Jeremiah’s ruined waistband—because they had refused to listen to the Lord. They had been stubborn in their hearts (cf. **Deuteronomy 26:17-19**), and had pursued idols by serving and worshipping them.

3. (:11) Corresponding Metaphor Explained: Relationship of Privilege and Opportunity Squandered

“For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen.’”

God has intended us to be trophies of His grace and glory

II. (:12-14) METAPHOR OF JUGS OF WINE – FROM IMBIBING TO INTOXICATION --

GOD’S WRATH WILL FILL THE WICKED AS THEY ARE DESTROYED

“Therefore you are to speak this word to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every jug is to be filled with wine.’ And when they say to you, ‘Do we not very well know that every jug is to be filled with wine?’ then say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, Behold I am about to fill all the inhabitants of this land-- the kings that sit for David on his throne, the priests, the prophets and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem-- with drunkenness! And I will dash them against each other, both the fathers and the sons together,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will not show pity nor be sorry nor have compassion that I should not destroy them.’”

Parunak: This is a dual image, seen most clearly in **Joel 2:24; 3:13**. On the one hand, full wine-jars is an image of the Lord's blessing; cf. **Prov. 3:9,10; Lev. 26:10; Joel 2:24**. On the other hand, it is an image of God's judgment; **Joel 3:13**.

Adam Clarke: You, and your kings, and priests, and prophets, are represented by these bottles. The wine is God's wrath against you, which shall first be shown by confounding your deliberations, filling you with foolish plans of defense, causing you from your divided counsels to fall out among yourselves, so that like so many drunken men you shall reel about and jostle each other; defend yourselves without plan, and fight without order, till ye all fall an easy prey into the hands of your enemies. The ancient adage is here fulfilled: -

Quos Deus vult perdere, prius dementat.

"Those whom God determines to destroy, he first renders foolish."

Mackay: In the Hebrew “*drunkenness*” is delayed to the very end of the sentence. The original saying had been an optimistic one, and “*I am going to fill*” leaves open the possibility of divine blessing, which the addition of “*drunkenness*” converts into a speech of judgment. No level of society will be exempted, but special mention is made of those in positions of leadership (**2:26; 4:9**). . . his judgment on them will in part consist of internal disorder and instability.

III. (:15-27) MESSAGES OF SHAME AND HUMILIATION – ADDRESSED TO THE PRIDEFUL PEOPLE, TO THE DEPOSED ROYAL LEADERS AND TO THE VANQUISHED CITY – 2 CYCLES

A. (:15-22) Cycle 1 – Darkness, Humiliation and Domination

1. (:15-17) Addressed to the People – Listen or Be Judged with Deep

Darkness

“Listen and give heed, do not be haughty, For the LORD has spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, Before He brings darkness And before your feet stumble On the dusky mountains, And while you are hoping for light He makes it into deep darkness, And turns it into gloom.

*But if you will not listen to it, My soul will sob in secret for such pride;
And my eyes will bitterly weep And flow down with tears, Because the
flock of the LORD has been taken captive.”*

Mackay: a picture of travelers on a mountain track overtaken by night before they reach their destination . . . The repeated “*before*” emphasizes that this is their last opportunity to do something before catastrophe engulfs them.

Thompson: Darkness is symbol of both the invasion and the coming exile (cf. **Isa. 5:20; 8:21-23; Amos 8:9**).

2. (:18-19) Addressed to the King and Queen Mother – **Humiliation**

*“Say to the king and the queen mother, ‘Take a lowly seat, For your
beautiful crown Has come down from your head. The cities of the Negev
have been locked up, And there is no one to open them; All Judah has
been carried into exile, Wholly carried into exile.”*

Constable: Jeremiah was to tell the king and the queen mother of Judah to humble themselves, because the Lord had removed their authority (in heaven) and would remove it soon (on earth). Pride was the besetting sin of royalty. The individuals in view are probably young King Jehoiachin and his mother Nehushta (cf. **Jeremiah 22:26; 2 Kings 24:8-17**). They were taken to Babylon as captives in 597 B.C. [Note: Less probably they were King Jehoiakim and his mother Zebidah (**2 Kings 23:36**).]

The queen mother was an important official throughout Israel’s monarchy, evidently as a counselor to the king, as was common in the ancient Near East (cf. **1 Kings 2:19; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 10:13**). Queen mothers assumed unusual prominence because of the widespread practice of polygamy among the kings.

Mackay: a call for humility as much as physical movement. They will shortly lose their regal status, and they may as well accustom themselves to that right away by sitting, presumably on the ground – as slaves?

3. (:20-22) Addressed to Jerusalem – **Domination**

*“Lift up your eyes and see Those coming from the north. Where is the
flock that was given you, Your beautiful sheep? What will you say when
He appoints over you-- And you yourself had taught them-- Former
companions to be head over you? Will not pangs take hold of you, Like a
woman in childbirth? And if you say in your heart, ‘Why have these
things happened to me?’ Because of the magnitude of your iniquity Your
skirts have been removed, And your heels have been exposed.”*

Mackay: So completely was their thinking dominated by the consensus outlook of popular religion – that Jerusalem was immune from total disaster – the people of the city cannot grasp that that is precisely what is staring them in the face.

B. (:23-27) Cycle 2 – Hopelessness, Exile, Shame

1. (:23) Addressed to the People (plural) – **Hopelessness** -- No Possibility of Self Reformation

“Can the Ethiopian change his skin Or the leopard his spots? Then you also can do good Who are accustomed to doing evil.”

2. (:24) Addressed to the King and Queen Mother – **Exiled** from the Land

“Therefore I will scatter them like drifting straw To the desert wind.”

Parunak: This time, the king and queen-mother are represented only by the Lord speaking to them about the people in the third person.

Mackay: The Lord says that there is no other solution to the problem of Judah’s persistent sin than by disrupting their link with the land, that is, blowing them off into exile.

3. (:25-27) Addressed to Jerusalem (feminine singular) – **Deserved Shame**

“This is your lot, the portion measured to you From Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘Because you have forgotten Me And trusted in falsehood. So I Myself have also stripped your skirts off over your face, That your shame may be seen. As for your adulteries and your lustful neighings, The lewdness of your prostitution On the hills in the field, I have seen your abominations. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you remain unclean?’”

Thompson: The point is made again that the coming judgment was not a chance thing. It was Judah’s *lot*, and it came from Yahweh himself. The reason was that Israel had *forgotten* Yahweh and trusted *The Lie*. In three striking phrases Judah’s wickedness is described – Your *adulteries*, your *lustful neighing*, your *lewd harlotries*. All these are an abomination to Yahweh. They were perpetuated, as was the practice, on the hills and in the open fields.

Adam Clarke: It was the custom to punish lewd women by stripping them naked, and exposing them to public view; or by throwing their clothes over their heads, as here intimated. . . We see from this, that though the thing was difficult, yet it was not impossible, for these Ethiopians to change their skin, for these leopards to change their spots. It was only their obstinate refusal of the grace of God that rendered it impossible. Man cannot change himself; but he may pray to God to do it, and come to him through Christ, that he may do it. To enable him to pray and believe, the power is still at hand. If he will not use it, he must perish.

Constable: Her citizens had behaved like adulterers and like copulating horses (cf. **Jeremiah 5:8**). The Lord had seen their unfaithful, lewd behavior toward Him when they worshipped idols and practiced sacred prostitution in the open-air shrines

across the land. Jerusalem was in deep trouble. How long would she continue in her wicked ways and remain unclean?! The question was expressing frustration, not requesting information.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What was God's purpose in using these metaphors and pictures?
- 2) How could the Jews still be surprised at the coming judgment and the severity of the judgment?
- 3) How is privilege spurned a greater offense than just pagan debauchery?
- 4) What does this passage contribute to an understanding of the biblical view towards alcoholic beverages?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peter Hoytema: Can I point you to another reference of linen hidden in a rock? It's found in **Matthew 27:59-60**, where we read about Joseph of Arimathea. He's the man who went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus after he had been crucified. *"Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock."* How the pierced body of Jesus must have stained and defiled that clean linen—but notice the incredible depiction of grace found in this gospel reading. Contrary to what we would expect, the clean linen cloth wrapped around the crucified body of Jesus is not rendered useless by the stains of our Lord's blood. That blood is precisely what renders all those ruined by sin useful for God's purposes once more. The very ones who were defiled by sin are re-commissioned for glory and for beauty! This is why the great multitude of saints John sees in the vision recorded in **Revelation 7:14** are said to be wearing white robes, "washed...and made white in the blood of the Lamb."

Only the blood of Jesus can make what sin has defiled clean again. It's what the fabric of your life can look like—and will graciously become—if you turn to Jesus in repentance and faith. All you need to do is what Joseph did: bury Jesus in the tomb that belonged to *you*. Jesus died the death we were supposed to die, so we could live the life we were supposed to live. That's the heart of the gospel. And that's the glory and beauty of God that adorns our lives.

Mackay: There are thus two aspects to the symbolism of the linen belt. It is a picture of the Exile coming upon a people who had failed to realize the potential of the situation

they had been blessed with. They would be cast off by the Lord as completely useless. But there is a more hopeful note also. Insofar as the belt represents the sinful pride of the nation which led them to putting their own wisdom and desires before that to God, it indicates the way in which through the Exile the Lord would take action to remove their arrogance.

Ryken: The parable of the linen belt thus reminds us to glorify God and trust in him alone. If your whole life is devoted to the service of Jesus Christ, you are like a linen belt around God's waist. You look great! But if you are trusting in money, ability, family, government, or anything besides God, then what you are doing is useless. If your life is not dedicated to bringing honor and renown to God, then it is worth about as much as a belt buried in a pile of dirt. You are worthless when it comes to your primary purpose – giving glory to God. You were made to be the brightest ornament in all creation, but the corruption of the best becomes the worst. . .

The best has become the worst. The linen belt, the full bottle of wine, the twilight on the mountainside, the royal family, and the shaming of the prostitute all teach the same lesson. These are five pictures of total depravity. They show what sin looks like and what kind of judgment it deserves. They show what human beings become when they fall short of the glory of God.

Thompson: Once the glory had departed from Israel the people were empty jars serving no purpose. It is clear that Israel had no claim upon Yahweh merely because he once chose them. Privilege always involves responsibility. An irresponsible Israel could not expect Yahweh's favor. Judah went to her fate because of her own disobedience and unfaithfulness and because of the arrogance and apostasy of the whole nation rather than because of any deliberate policy of the invading Chaldeans.

Peter Wallace: The Prophetic Ministry of the Word

And tonight we are hearing from the prophet Jeremiah part of what the ministry of the Word is supposed to do.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul says to Timothy: "I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching." In other words, Paul tells Timothy: Judgment Day is coming – so preach the Word.

Jeremiah focuses on the word more than any other prophet: Jeremiah says "thus says the LORD" 155 times – which is more than the rest of the OT combined! (Shead, 45) And he uses the phrase "declares the LORD" 167 times – which also is more than the rest of the OT combined! (Shead, 46) That's 322 references to "the word of the LORD" in 52 chapters. And that's not including phrases like "the word of the LORD came to me" – or "as the LORD commanded me." Jeremiah relentlessly reminds us that he is not saying hard things because he feels like it. He is saying hard things because the LORD insists upon it! The LORD has spoken. The God who created all things has

declared it.

That's why I decided to stick with our Jeremiah series for the installation sermon. We need to remember that the word of the LORD may not be comfortable for either the preacher or the hearers! At the heart of all sin and rebellion is the refusal to accept God as God – a refusal to hear his Word and do it. And so we start with a somewhat bizarre example: The word "loincloth" is used eight times in these eleven verses. Curiously, there are also eight uses of the various ways of talking about the word of the LORD: "Thus says the LORD to me" (v1) "according to the word of the LORD" (v2) "And the word of the LORD came to me a second time" (v3) "as the LORD commanded me" (v5) "And after many days the LORD said to me" (v6) "that I commanded you" (v6) "Then the word of the LORD came to me" (v8) "declares the LORD" (v11)

1. The Good-for-Nothing Loincloth: Or, What Is the Chief End of Man? (v1-11)

Thus says the LORD to me, "Go and buy a linen loincloth and put it around your waist, and do not dip it in water." 2 So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it around my waist. While some have suggested that the linen loincloth would resemble priestly garments, the word for linen is not the normal word used with priestly garments. Nonetheless, the linen loincloth would contrast with the rougher cloth that Jeremiah wore. And so... 3 And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, 4 "Take the loincloth that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a cleft of the rock." 5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. 6 And after many days the LORD said to me, "Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there." 7 Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was spoiled; it was good for nothing. If "Euphrates" means the river in Mesopotamia, then this would be a journey of several weeks or months. But there is a place about three miles from Anathoth called "Parah" that in Hebrew is spelled almost exactly like "Euphrates." I suspect that the confusion is intentional. After all, Jeremiah 13 will be the first time that Jeremiah explicitly uses the word "exile" since chapter 1. And Judah will be sent into exile to the Euphrates. I suspect that God chose Parah precisely because it sounds like "Euphrates." Going to Parah becomes a symbolic act of going to Babylon. Of course, it's also possible that God really did send Jeremiah to the Euphrates twice – with only a few days in between the two really long journeys!

But so far, all we have is a really weird, confusing symbolic action. Like the parables of Jesus, the symbolic actions of Jeremiah are designed to communicate – but only to those who have insight – who understand the deeper meaning of the picture. Indeed, Jeremiah's symbolic actions are parables. And their deeper meaning can only be understood by the word of the LORD. The explanation of the parable is found in verses 8-11: 8 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 9 "Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. 10 This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. 11 For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole

house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen.

Think about what this loincloth tells us! “I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me” – God’s purpose in calling Israel and Judah was so that he might wear them. God’s people – the church – is a garment to adorn God. “That they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory...” Israel was called to be God’s people – so that God might look good! The Shorter Catechism captures this in its opening answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.” Adam had sinned – and so God had banished mankind from the Garden. But the Exodus was designed as the “new creation” of the people of God. God called Israel to succeed where Adam had failed. God brought Israel into the Promised Land – a ‘new Eden’ as it were.

The only other place that uses the language of “a name, a praise, and a glory” is Deuteronomy 26:18-19 – “And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, and that he will set you in praise and in fame [or name] and in honor [or glory] high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.” In Deuteronomy 26, the focus is on how God will do this for Israel – so that God would make for Israel a name, a praise, and a glory.

In Jeremiah 13, we see that the opposite is also true: when Israel obeys and follows the LORD, then Israel is “a people, a name, a praise, and a glory” But pay attention to what God is saying! What was the purpose of the loincloth? To “cling to the waist of a man.” What was the purpose of Israel? To “cling to me, declares the LORD.” God wanted a people who would be near to him – a people who would cling to him – (and yes, this is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 – when a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife!). Jeremiah is tying together Deuteronomy language with Genesis language – showing that Jerusalem was supposed to be the new Eve.

But after all these years, Israel is like a spoiled loincloth. It’s disgusting. It’s filthy. Who would want to wear this? “They would not listen.” “This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing.” Israel has turned out to be just like Adam – Jerusalem is just like Eve. Humanity is filthy, disgusting, and spoiled. Even God’s chosen people, Israel, are good for nothing. Who would want to wear such a filthy, disgusting garment?

All Jeremiah tells us is that the loincloth was good for nothing. He doesn’t tell us what he did with it! What would you do with a filthy, disgusting loincloth? We’re not talking about an old garment that needs patching. We’re not talking about a worn out shirt that you can “repurpose” for something else. We’re talking about a moldy tattered loincloth. It’s good for nothing. The whole house of Israel – and the whole house of Judah – are good for nothing. 5 And what is it that God condemns? “The pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.” In precisely the place where you think most highly of

yourself, God says that you are good for nothing!

And yet the Word became flesh and dwelt among us! Indeed, the Word became flesh as a Jew. Jeremiah doesn't tell us the good news yet – but in Jeremiah 33, the prophet will return to this triad of “name, praise, and glory” as he speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem, “I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth.” (33:8-9)

2. Smashing Drunk: The Messianic Drinking of the Cup of God's Wrath (v12-14)

Wine was considered a blessing – so when Jeremiah says, “Every jar shall be filled with wine,” the initial response will be positive! Jesus, after all, will fill six stone jars with the best wine for a wedding at Cana. Every jar will be filled with wine!

But wine can be either a blessing or a curse: 13 Then you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land: the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 14 And I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the LORD. Prophets, priests, and kings – and all the people. Every jar shall be filled with wine – and then smashed together!

And God speaks frankly about what is coming: I will not pity or spare or have compassion, that I should not destroy them.’” Usually, when God sends a prophet, the people are being given a chance to repent. 6 Now, God says that there is no way to avoid this coming destruction. Why does God do this? Why does God bring judgment – dashing fathers and sons against one another? Smashing his own people? Jesus will show us why. Because Jesus will take this cup himself.

If there is no way to escape the coming judgment, then what is Jeremiah's purpose? The answer is found in verses 15-17. Judgment is coming. You cannot escape. So how shall the faithful remnant respond to the wrath of God:

3. Be Not Proud: The Prophet's Secret Weeping (v15-17)

Judgment is coming. You cannot escape. All you can do is “give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness.” “Give glory to the LORD” is what Joshua told Achan to do in Joshua 7:19-20, after Achan had been found guilty of taking the devoted things. You are about to die – so give glory to the LORD! Again, think of our Lord Jesus!

Think of how Jesus says this in John 12:28, “Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” How does God glorify his name? Jesus goes on to say, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” (v32-33) The glory of God is revealed in the cross of Jesus. We will be singing Psalm 23 – “yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” – the valley of deep darkness. That valley of deep darkness is the valley through which Jesus

walked. There was no way for Jesus to escape that judgment. Jesus had to recapitulate the history of Israel – Israel was called to succeed where Adam had failed. But Israel had failed – just like Adam. And so now Jesus must pass through all the phases of the life of the people of God. Including – and especially – the wrath and curse of God in the exile.

But in Jeremiah's day, the people of God failed the test. They did not give glory to God in the face of exile. Instead, as Jeremiah says in verse 17: 17 But if you will not listen, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock has been taken captive. Why in secret? Because the LORD has forbidden Jeremiah to pray for his people. God has said, "I will not listen" – and so Jeremiah must weep bitterly in secret for their pride – for their arrogance – because the LORD's flock has been taken captive. It may be a ruined loincloth. But Jeremiah remembers what Judah was supposed to be! And so finally, for the first time since the introduction in chapter 1, Jeremiah uses the word "exile."

4. Okay, Fine, I'll Say It! Exile Is Coming (v18-19)

Jeremiah hasn't used the word "exile" since 1:3. Now he uses it twice in order to highlight it. Pride goes before a fall. Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. If you will not give glory to the LORD – if you insist on being proud and arrogant – if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, and repent! then you will lose all that you love.

Hebrews 10:28-29 will give us similar warnings: "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"

Deuteronomy had said that if Israel refused to hear and obey the Law of Moses, then God would bring judgment and destruction. Even so, if you reject Jesus and his sacrifice, then there is no other sacrifice that can cover sin! All that is left is judgment and death. And God says that all of this has happened because of your sin. This is the final point in Jeremiah 13. Judgment has come upon you because of your sin! It would be wrong to see every bad thing as a judgment for your personal sin. Jesus rebukes those who think that the blind man was born blind either for his own or for his parent's sin. So we should not view every bad thing simply as a judgment for our sin.

But there is a shift in pronoun in verses 20-27 – whereas the "you" in verses 18-19 was masculine plural (the king and the queen mother)– now in verses 20-27, the "you" is feminine singular (Jerusalem).

5. Your Sin Has Brought This Upon You (v20-27)

Our passage began with a cloth around Jeremiah's waist. Now it ends with the skirts of Jerusalem being lifted up. The imagery moves quickly – and fearfully! The pain of

childbirth in verse 21. And then rape in verse 22. Throughout all of human history, the horrors of war have included death, rape, and plunder. It is entirely right to say “war is hell.” And that is why God says that Jerusalem has brought this hell upon herself:

23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. Here is Jerusalem’s problem: she cannot change! Here is our problem: we cannot change! Left to ourselves, we will never change!

And so God says to his helpless people: 24 I will scatter you[a] like chaff driven by the wind from the desert. 25 This is your lot, the portion I have measured out to you, declares the LORD, because you have forgotten me and trusted in lies. 26 I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen. 27 I have seen your abominations, your adulteries and neighings, your lewd whorings, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will it be before you are made clean?”

Notice that in the final “woe” in verse 27, God reveals the solution: “How long will it be before you are made clean?” We started with a filthy loincloth. Now, the LORD asks, “How long will it be before you are made clean?” Jerusalem is a filthy garment. Zion has failed. The Church has fallen into idolatry – and adultery. This is the problem with the earthly Jerusalem. She keeps failing! If you put your hope in the earthly Jerusalem, you will be disappointed.

We’ve seen in recent weeks that the church is our mother – and that is an important doctrine! But Paul reminds us in Galatians 4 that the earthly Jerusalem is Hagar – she is in bondage with her children. But the heavenly Jerusalem is free – and she is our mother! In the book of Revelation, we see a similar contrast between a filthy, whoring city – Babylon the Great – who falls under the judgment of God.

But in Revelation 19:6-8, we hear something new as well! “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure – (for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).” Finally, we see a beautiful, glorious city! The Heavenly Zion – our Mother! And finally, the filthy loincloth of Jeremiah 13 is replaced with the fine linen – of the righteous deeds of the saints! Jesus has died to cover all your sins with his precious blood. God no longer sees your sins. He sees Jesus and his righteousness in your justification. And he sees only the good works that he has wrought in your sanctification.

TEXT: Jeremiah 14:1-22

TITLE: TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE

BIG IDEA:
SOMETIMES GOD DOESN'T COME TO THE RESCUE

INTRODUCTION:

The Israelites were a people that were accustomed to God bailing them out of every disastrous situation. Abraham got himself into multiple pickles because of his lies about Sarah being his sister; but God came through and protected his seed and his family dynasty. The Jews were subjected to 400 years of captivity in Egypt but God provided Moses and Joshua to lead them to the Promised Land. In the times of the Judges we saw the same cycle repeated of stubborn sin and rebellion followed by subjugation until God raised up a Savior to deliver His people. The Jews came to believe that they were invincible because of their covenant relationship with Yahweh.

But God shows here that one cannot presume against His goodness and forbearance. There comes a time when he will no longer listen to insincere pleas for help that are not coupled to genuine repentance. There comes a time when the rope has been played out and judgment is inevitable. We must be careful in our own lives to turn back to God while there is still time to seek mercy and forgiveness. We cannot persist on a course of stubborn rebellion and expect that there will always be a path back to God.

SOMETIMES GOD DOESN'T COME TO THE RESCUE

Illustration: Old TV series: Rin Tin Tin – where in the moment of crisis you hear the encouraging bugle sounds and the cavalry rides in to perform the needed rescue.

I. (:1-6) JUDGMENT BRINGS SHAME AND HUMILIATION

A. (:1) Severe Drought = Context of Judgment

“That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah in regard to the drought:”

This adversity is a nationwide scourge of divine judgment that has produced widespread death and destruction – targeting not only the apostate people but the environment as well.

Parunak: "Dearth" (famine) has potentially a wider meaning. In its other two occurrences (**Ps. 9:10; 10:1**) it seems to mean more generally, "trouble, destitution." The chapter is not just about famine, though it starts on that note. In fact, our study of **Lev. 26** and **2 Chr. 6** suggests that the people's prayer is hopeless partially because they are well beyond the "famine" stage. The word is plural, not singular. Probably emphasizes the set of judgments that the Lord is bringing on them.

Constable: Droughts were a punishment for covenant violation in Israel (cf. **Leviticus 26:18-19; Deuteronomy 28:23-24**). This pericope begins with an unusual introductory statement, which occurs again in **Jeremiah 46:1; Jeremiah 47:1; and Jeremiah 49:34**.

B. (:2-3) Shame and Humiliation of the Leaders = Nobility

*“Judah mourns, And her gates languish; They sit on the ground in mourning, And the cry of Jerusalem has ascended. And their nobles have sent their servants for water; They have come to the cisterns and found no water. They have returned with their vessels empty; They have been put to **shame and humiliated**, And they **cover their heads**.”*

Bible.org – “her gates” -- This is the place where the life of the city was centralized. It was a place of social and civic justice (i.e., **Deut. 16:18; Ruth 4**).

Matthew Henry: perhaps their own children, having been forced to part with their servants because they had not wherewithal to keep them, and being willing to train up their children, when they were little, to labour, especially in a case of necessity, as this was.

Mackay: *Her gates languish* also involves a wordplay because the verb can denote both a physical effect on crops (“fails” **Joel 1:10**; “is withered” *Joel 1:12*) and also human sorrow that is so severe as to lead to physical exhaustion and weakness (“grow faint”, **15:9**; “pine away, **1 Sam. 2:5; Isa. 19:8**).

C. (:4-6) Shame and Humiliation of the Farmers = Working Class

*“Because the ground is cracked, For there has been no rain on the land; The farmers have been put to **shame**, They have **covered their heads**. For even the doe in the field has given birth only to abandon her young, Because there is no grass. And the wild donkeys stand on the bare heights; They pant for air like jackals, Their eyes fail For there is no vegetation.”*

Constable: There was so little grass available that even the does, that normally took good care of their newborn fawns, deserted them to find grass to keep themselves alive. Even the wild donkeys, known for their hardiness, could only stand and sniff the wind on the hills, since they could find nothing to eat. They panted and their eyes grew dim from lack of sustenance as they started to die.

Thompson: The total picture is a graphic one touching on the most pathetic aspects of nature in a time of drought: empty pools, dried up pasture lands, and wild animals at the point of starvation and death.

II. (:7-9) JEHOVAH GOD UPHOLDS THE HONOR OF HIS NAME

A. (:7-8a) Confession of Sin that Has Profaned the Name of God

1. (:7a) Honor of God = Basis for Deliverance from Consequences of Sin

“Although our iniquities testify against us, O LORD,

act for Thy name's sake!"

Parunak: vv.7-9, People to YHWH: *Save us for your name's sake, in spite of our sin.* Their plea is chiasmic, with requests for salvation for the sake of the Lord's name sandwiched around a description of that name.

Mackay: *"For the sake of your name"* points to all that God has revealed himself to be (cf. v. 21). At times it refers to the Lord's power and sovereignty, and so the action looked for would be such as would keep his name from being maligned among the heathen – but that does not seem to be the force of it here. Equally, divine action for his own name's sake may involve punishing wrongdoers, so that the Lord's justice be openly vindicated – but again that does not fit this context. Rather it seems to be a plea focused on the graciousness of God who has revealed himself as the one characterised by lovingkindness. Jeremiah is teaching the people to plead God's mercy and his covenant commitment as the ground for his action. It is only on the basis of grace that they can hope for relief from suffering the penalty that is justly their due.

2. (:7b) Honest Confession -- Apostasies Have Been Many – Judgment is Deserved

*"Truly our apostasies have been many,
We have sinned against Thee."*

Mackay: realization of the magnitude of guilt is presented as a reason for divine intervention and initiative: there is simply no other way in which the matter can be successfully dealt with.

3. (:8a) Hope for Deliverance Based on Covenant Relationship

*"Thou Hope of Israel,
Its Savior in time of distress,"*

2 important names of God that have manifested themselves in God's covenant relationship with His chosen people

Bible.org: YHWH (specified in the LXX of v. 8) is described by two covenant titles.

1. *O Hope of Israel* - this refers to YHWH as the God of the Patriarchs (cf. 17:13; 50:7)
2. *Savior* - this is a common characterization or title in Isaiah (cf. 19:20; 43:3,11; 45:15,21; 49:26; 60:16; 63:8)

B. (:8b-9a) Questions of Dismay – Where God Seems to be Acting our of Character

1. (:8b) Question #1 – Where is Your Covenant Connection?

*"Why art Thou like a stranger in the land
Or like a traveler who has pitched his tent for the night?"*

Parunak: Why should you seem unwilling to save, like a stranger who has no commitment to the land, but only spends the night there on the way to somewhere else? (NB: this language draws heavily on **9:2**, where the Lord said he would be just this way.)

2. (:9a) Question #2 – Where is the Display of Your Saving Power

*“Why art Thou like a man dismayed,
Like a mighty man who cannot save?”*

Matthew Henry: Why does the almighty God seem as if he were no more than a mighty man, who, when he is astonished, though he would, yet cannot save?

T. Miles Bennett: In this “communal lament” the people confess sins and cry out to God for help ‘in a time of severe need. There is some difficulty, however, in assessing the sincerity of their confession. On the surface at least there is much that is positive about their prayer: confession of sins (v. 7), recognition of God’s lordship, and acknowledging him as their *hope* and *deliverer* (v. 8a). But there are negative aspects as well, e.g., the *why* of vss. 8 and 9 which seem to point an accusing finger at God. One writer capsules the negatives of the confession by commenting that it is interesting to observe the people do not inquire, ‘Why are we letting God down?’ but, ‘Why is he letting us down?’

C. (:9b) Affirmation of Covenant Commitment to Uphold God’s Reputation

1. Appeal to Presence of God

“Yet Thou art in our midst, O LORD,”

Adam Clarke: Thy ark, temple, and sacred rites, are all here; and thou thyself, who art every where present, art here also: but alas! thou dost not reveal thyself as the Father of mercies, who forgivest iniquity, transgression, and sin.

2. Appeal to Covenant Connection and Honor of God’s Name

“And we are called by Thy name;”

3. Appeal to Mercy of God

“Do not forsake us!”

Gino Geraci: The people of Judah and Jerusalem cried out to God when they got into trouble. But their prayers were insincere. The people wanted the circumstance to change but were unwilling to allow their hearts to be broken and changed!

Bible.org: This is an unusual meaning for this verb. It is found only here and **Ps. 119:121**, in the sense of “*abandon*.”

III. (:10-18) JUDGMENT WILL NOT BE AVERTED

A. (:10-12) Rejection of Futile, Last Ditch Cries for Help

1. (:10) Time for Judgment has Arrived

“Thus says the LORD to this people, ‘Even so they have loved to wander; they have not kept their feet in check. Therefore the LORD does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity and call their sins to account.’”

Mackay: They do not want to have fixed allegiance to the Lord, but much prefer moving restlessly about between one idol shrine and another, or if understood in political terms, between one foreign alliance and another. They would do anything at all so long as it did not involve recognition of the Lord.

2. (:11-12) Time for Intercessory Prayer and Religious Rites Are Past

“So the LORD said to me, ‘Do not pray for the welfare of this people. When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence.’”

Bible.org: "sword, famine and pestilence" These three form the triad of the terrible results of invasion (cf. **5:12; 14:15; 27:8; 29:18**).

Thompson: The futility of religious exercises is again stressed. Fasting, burnt offerings, and cereal offerings are not acceptable to Yahweh in the absence of obedience (cf. **6:20; 7:21-28; 11:15**). For such people intercession would be in vain.

B. (:13-16) Repudiation of False Prophets and Their Promise of Peace

1. (:13) False Prophets Preach a False Gospel

“But, ‘Ah, Lord God!’ I said, ‘Look, the prophets are telling them, ‘You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place.’”

In step with those who preach the Prosperity Gospel – a message that tickles the ears and is pleasing with the majority of people

Constable: Jeremiah suggested that the people were not totally responsible for their behavior. The false prophets had misled them by promising them lasting peace and prosperity. He hinted that perhaps the Lord Himself was partially responsible since His prophets were misleading the people. Jeremiah penned more about the false prophets than any other writing prophet.

2. (:14) False Prophets Claim False Authority

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and

the deception of their own minds.”

- Falsely claim divine initiation and authentication for their message
- Speak falsehood – a false vision, a false divination
- Words lead to futility rather than edification
- Self-deceived

3. (:15-16) False Prophets Bring Down God’s Wrath – On Themselves and On All Who Follow Them

“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them-- yet they keep saying, 'There shall be no sword or famine in this land '-- by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end! The people also to whom they are prophesying will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and there will be no one to bury them-- neither them, nor their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters-- for I shall pour out their own wickedness on them.

Parunak: Application: Beware the danger of false teaching. You can never plead, "It's not my fault, I was misled." Those who are mistaught are still liable for their error. You can never hide behind your preacher.

Feinberg: The people should have known that the Lord punishes sin, and they should not have believed the false prophets. The judgment of the nation is spoken of here because the people were willing to be deceived

C. (:17-18) Reflection on the Sad State of God’s Chosen People, Leaders and City

“And you will say this word to them, 'Let my eyes flow down with tears night and day, And let them not cease; For the virgin daughter of my people has been crushed with a mighty blow, With a sorely infected wound. If I go out to the country, Behold, those slain with the sword! Or if I enter the city, Behold, diseases of famine! For both prophet and priest Have gone roving about in the land that they do not know.”

Gino Geraci: How does God feel? Jeremiah is told to weep for the people (**Jeremiah 9:8; 13:17**). How does Jeremiah feel? He feels like a father whose virgin daughter (*bethulah*) has been violated, beaten, humiliated and left to die! There seems to be a double meaning. The city has been protected-- but is now ravished. A deep sense of sorrow surges through Jeremiah! Jeremiah is not exempted from the pain. Let my eyes run down with tears (**9:18; 13:17; Lam.2:18; 3:48, 49**). Jeremiah cries a lot.

Parunak: God commands him to exhibit an attitude of pity and mourning, not one of proud condemnation.

Adam Clarke: Every place presents frightful spectacles; the wounded, the dying, the starving, and the slain; none to bury the dead, none to commiserate the dying, none to

bring either relief or consolation. Even the prophets and the priests are obliged to leave the cities, and wander about in unfrequented and unknown places, seeking for the necessities of life.

IV. (:19-22) JEHOVAH GOD WILL REMEMBER HIS COVENANT – AND NOT COMPLETELY REJECT HIS PEOPLE

A. (:19) Perplexity of Rejection

1. How Complete?

*“Hast Thou completely rejected Judah?
Or hast Thou loathed Zion?”*

2. Why No Relief?

“Why hast Thou stricken us so that we are beyond healing?”

Bible.org: This third question is the central issue - Has the conditional covenant with Abraham been totally abrogated by Israel and Judah's continual disobedience? Well, yes and no!

1. Yes - and this sets the stage for the "new covenant" of **31:31-34** (cf. **Rom. 3:21-31; Galatians 3**)

2. No - see **Lev. 26:43**, YHWH still has a purpose for His OT people (cf. **Romans 9-11**)

3. Where is Our Hope?

*“We waited for peace, but nothing good came;
And for a time of healing, but behold, terror!”*

T. Miles Bennett: vv. 19-22 -- It is instructive to compare this confession and appeal with the first one (**vv. 7-9**). Here as in the first sins are confessed. In both God is acknowledged as the “hope” of Israel (Judah). But the most significant similarity between the two is the strong stress placed on the Lord’s obligations to Judah and the tendency to overlook their own obligations to their covenant God.

Mackay: The major problem in understanding these closing four verses is to decide the tone in which they were uttered. Is this the people pleading on their own behalf using sound religious vocabulary but without heart commitment, or is this the prophet uttering on their behalf what they should have been saying for themselves? On the one reading, the words are false; on the other, the sentiments are true but unable to lead to reconciliation in that they were not endorsed by the people. It seems best to adopt the same interpretation as in **vv. 7-9** that here Jeremiah again utters words that the people should, but do not, adopt for themselves.

B. (:20) Perspective of Rebellion

*“We know our wickedness, O LORD, The iniquity of our fathers,
for we have sinned against Thee.”*

C. (:21) Plea for Remembrance

1. Based on Name of God

“Do not despise us, for Thine own name's sake;”

2. Based on Glory of God

“Do not disgrace the throne of Thy glory;”

Bible.org: *the throne of Your glory* (i.e., the Ark of the Covenant in the holy of holies, cf. **3:17; 17:12**)

3. Based on Covenant of God

“Remember and do not annul Thy covenant with us.”

D. (:22) Promise of Reigning

*“Are there any among the idols of the nations who give rain?
Or can the heavens grant showers? Is it not Thou, O LORD our God?
Therefore we hope in Thee, For Thou art the one who hast done all these
things.”*

Who ultimately is in charge? Not the idols of the nations; they have proven powerless; it is Jehovah God who controls all things and reigns on high over all; We will put our faith and trust in Him for our future hope. His kingdom is coming and it is an eternal kingdom where He will have dominion over all.

Guzik: The chapter began with concern over the droughts. Now Jeremiah hopefully speaks for a repentant people who recognize that Baal or any of the other idols are powerless to cause rain. Not even nature separated from God can do it (can the heavens give showers?). The judgment of God, severe as it was, separated them from the idolatry and reliance upon the gods of the nations or nature to cause rain.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When do you still feel shame and humiliation despite the forgiveness of sins from the blood of Christ?
- 2) How would you describe any trials of dry spells that the Lord brought into your life for disciplinary purposes?
- 3) What types of questions of perplexity do you entertain from time to time?
- 4) How do I view my behavior as tied to the honor of God's name?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gino Geraci: The fourth sermon began in **chapter 11**; the fifth sermon in **chapter 13**; and now this sixth sermon will begin with suffering (**vv.1-6**); a terrible drought grips the land. It continues with supplication (**vv.7-9**); the people cry out to God for mercy; wanting to know the reason for their suffering. It continues with an examination and explanation of their sinfulness (**v.10**); God explains their sin has brought on their suffering. In the next few chapters Jeremiah will deliver four messages. Sandwiched in between the messages are Jeremiah's prayers and the answers from the Lord Jeremiah receives.

<http://www.calvarycsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Jeremiah-14-1-22.pdf>

Richard Nysse: God has rejected the people of God. The false prophets had insisted that God would not reject. Instead, God, in their view, would only bless, even to the point of exempting them from the natural consequences of social injustice. They claimed that the community would not experience sword and famine (**13, 15**). But the famine was already in place (**1-6**)!

The famine was both the natural consequence of social disorder and the active work of God. God was active in the collapse: "*By sword, by famine, and by pestilence I consume them.*" When the people state at the end of their petition in **verse 22** that the Lord has done all this, they are not exaggerating. Neither are they shifting the blame to God and off themselves. In their lament they do not claim to be innocent sufferers. The severity of the punishment is at issue because it means the end of the relationship, not because the punishment exceeds the crime.

Once God is active in punishment, the only way out comes from God. That is what is being pleaded here, and the plea is rejected by God. God is, in this text, rejecting the intercession of the people -- not because it is insincere, but because the time for pleas is over. Judgment (rejection) has commenced. Even the prophet is prohibited from taking up their plea. . .

By itself, there is no easy good news in this chapter. This chapter remembers iniquity -- period! We should avoid the temptation to jump ahead to Jeremiah 31:34 too quickly: "I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." The move to forgiveness goes through the heart of God, and we know from the New Testament that it is not a facile move. It involves a crucifixion. False prophets seek to avoid the agony of Jeremiah 14 and in the process both mislead the people and trivialize the crucifixion.
https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1850

Ryken: It seems unnatural to Americans to repent for national or familial sins. We are used to taking responsibility for our own sins, and our own sins only. If our ancestors did something unfair we say, "That was before my time." When our company does something immoral we say, "I just work here." When our denomination does something un-Biblical we say, "That has nothing to do with my local congregation."

When our country does something unjust we say, “I just live here.” But Biblical repentance extends to the sins of family, church, and nation. Since we share in the guilt of corporate sins, we must confess the sins of our group.

Mackay: Breach of covenant is no light thing and results in disaster. There are two alternating ideas in the passage: the hope that the false prophets had encouraged the people to have, namely that everything will turn out well in the end, and the divine negative. The prophet’s plea and the pleas he puts on the lips of the people are of no avail in averting the impending catastrophe, for after all the people remain impenitent. How can God extend the blessings of the covenant to those who are so resolute in wandering off from him and entertaining all manner of unjustified expectation? It is not God who must be asked not to reject his people (v. 21), but the people who must be asked why they rejected their God (15:6). And yet, throughout it all, there is in the words that the prophet utters on behalf of the people something more, a glimpse that after the darkness there might be repentance and restoration.

Peter Wallace: Famine, Sword and Pestilence

What is wrong with Zion’s repentance in these verses? Our shorter catechism provides a good summary of what is repentance: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, does, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God with full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience.”

What’s missing in these verses? Is there a true sense of sin? “Our iniquities testify against us – our backslidings are many” (14:7)

Is there an apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ? “O you hope of Israel, its savior in time of trouble...” (14:8) “You, O LORD, are in the midst of us, and we are called by your name” (14:9)

Is there grief and hatred of sin? “We acknowledge our wickedness, O LORD, and the iniquity of our fathers, for we have sinned against you.” (14:20)

Is there a turning to God? “We set our hope on you, for you do all these things” (14:22)

Is there a purpose for new obedience? It’s not explicit – but I think it’s there. In other words, there’s nothing obviously missing here. This looks and sounds like true repentance because it is true repentance!

What God is saying is that there is a time when it is too late to repent. There is a point at which God says, “Time’s up!” What is that point? Judgment Day. After all, what God is describing in these verses is nothing less than hell. But if you think about it, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC was a picture of the final judgment. God poured out a picture of the final judgment upon his own people, so that we might see what sin deserves – so that we might see that the wages of sin is death. Indeed, all that Jeremiah describes in these verses is w 2 the drought in verses 1-12, and the coming sword and

famine in 14:13-15:4

In each case study, there is a common pattern: The situation, Jerusalem's plea, and God's refusal to hear them. The drought serves as a warning of the final judgment. The sword signals the coming of God's final judgment. And the whole passage concludes with the reason why this is happening. This is happening because my people persistently and stubbornly rejected me. If you will not love and serve the LORD your God, the only possible outcome is hell.

Today, because of what Jesus has done, you can have confidence that if you repent, God will forgive. But you need to understand that if you refuse to repent – if you insist on rebelling against God, then there is a day when God will no longer forgive. And in the same way, the day-to-day disasters that happen nowadays are reminders – warnings of the judgment to come. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars – when you hear of famine, plague, and drought – you should remember that one day God will call all of us to his judgment seat. What will you say? What will be your plea before God?

There's an old song that says it well: What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

1. The Drought (14:1-12)

a. The Situation: No Water for the People, the Ground, and the Animals (v1-6)

In verses 1-6, Jeremiah describes the situation – the cisterns are empty – the farmers have no crops – even the ground is “dismayed,” and the wild animals perish. As God had said, “Cursed be the ground for your sake.” Just as Adam's sin brought God's curse on the whole of creation, even so, the whole of creation suffers because of Israel's sin.

The judgment of God has a tremendous leveling effect! The nobility of Jerusalem is no better than a common farmer. And the farmer is no better than the wild donkey. There is no vegetation. Man and beast suffer alike. Remember that in the Exodus, when God delivered Israel from Egypt, the death of the firstborn was not merely the firstborn of man, but also the firstborn of animals. God's judgment on humanity falls also against the realm that man was designed to rule. Sin not only affects your soul – it also affects your body, and every other aspect of creation.

In verses 7-9 we hear the plea of Israel for forgiveness:

b. The Plea: “You Are the Hope of Israel – Do Not Leave Us!” (v7-9)

Like I said earlier – this is a good prayer for forgiveness. We confess our sins. We acknowledge that the LORD alone is our hope and our savior. God alone can save. We are called by his name. Therefore we ask him to act – not because of who we are, but because of who he is.

Some commentators think that Israel is insulting God by comparing him to a stranger or traveler – or by asking are you like a “mighty warrior who cannot save?” But there are many Psalms that use precisely this sort of language. The problem with this prayer is not the content! The problem with this prayer is the timing. After all, what is this prayer

asking God to do? This prayer is asking God to forgive Jerusalem and save Israel – at precisely the moment when God’s purpose is to bring judgment upon Israel. But it’s too late! As the LORD says in verse 10:

c. The Refusal: “I Will Not Hear Their Cry... I Will Consume Them” (v10-12)

10 Thus says the LORD concerning this people: “They have loved to wander thus; they have not restrained their feet; therefore the LORD does not accept them; now he will remember their iniquity and punish their sins.” God hears their confession and says, “That’s right, they have sinned. But the wages of sin is death.” And now Israel must die.

And Jeremiah says in verse 11, 11 The LORD said to me: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. 12 Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.” Repentance is not enough. Fasting is not enough. Burnt offerings and grain offerings is not enough. God says, “I will not hear their cry... I will not accept them.”

The point is not that Jerusalem needs to do something more. The point is that Jerusalem is utterly and entirely incapable of doing anything that would cause God to save them. And that hasn’t changed! Repentance cannot save you. Fasting cannot save you. Doing all the religious things that God calls you to do cannot save you. Nothing can for sin atone – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Naught of good that I have done – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Our second point drives this home.

2. Sword and Famine (14:13-15:4)

a. The Situation: Prophets Who Prophesy Lies (v13-18)

Because there are other prophets who would assure Jerusalem of God’s favor: 13 Then I said: “Ah, Lord GOD, behold, the prophets say to them, ‘You shall not see the sword, nor shall you have famine, but I will give you assured peace in this place.’” 14 And the LORD said to me: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who prophesy in my name although I did not send them, and who say, ‘Sword and famine shall not come upon this land’: By sword and famine those prophets shall be consumed. 16 And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, victims of famine and sword, with none to bury them—they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. For I will pour out their evil upon them.

Famine and sword – what does it have to do with us? It has been a long time since North America had any real experience of these things. Jesus will gaze out over Jerusalem, and weep. 18 If I go out into the field, behold, those pierced by the sword! And if I enter the city, behold, the diseases of famine! For both prophet and priest ply their trade through the land and have no knowledge.” The false prophets and the faithless priests have wreaked havoc on Judah. You see the fruit of the false teachers

throughout Europe and America today. There may not be a famine of bread in Europe and America today. But there is a famine of hearing the Word of the Lord.

In my former congregation we once had a visitor who said that she appreciated the sermon, but since she was Baptist, she thought that she'd look around. After she had visited every church in town and the surrounding area she came back and said, "You are the only pastor in this area who actually preaches the Bible." Has the day really come when prophets and priests have no knowledge, when pastors no longer preach the Word of God? Again, the plea of verses 19-22 is a good example of confession:

b. The Plea: Remember Your Covenant – We Set Our Hope on You! (v19-22)

Again, there is nothing wrong with the content of this plea. 8 It is a perfectly good prayer of confession – it is a beautiful lament! You are God – and we are not! The reason why you should save us is not because of anything that we have done – but simply for "your name's sake" – "Remember and do not break your covenant with us." This is precisely how Israel was supposed to pray! This is all my hope and peace – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my righteousness – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. But (verse 15)

c. The Refusal: Send Them to Pestilence, Sword, Famine, and Captivity (15:1-4)

Moses and Samuel were famous for their intercession for Israel. Moses was the prophet who gave Israel the Law. Then, when Israel failed the first time, in the days of the Judges, Samuel was the prophet who gave Israel the King. In the days of Samuel God sent the ark of the covenant into Exile. But now, God will send his people into Exile. I will appoint over them four kinds of destroyers, declares the LORD: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. Notice that all creation joins in the destruction of God's people. Not just the sword of men – but also the dogs to tear, and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy. 4 And I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, did in Jerusalem.

The reference to Manasseh reminds us of how the wickedness of Jerusalem had been piling up over generations, as the rebellion of God's people got worse and worse. 9 The result will be that God will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. And verses 5-9 explain why:

3. Why? Because You Have Rejected Me and I Am Weary of Relenting (15:5-9)

God is weary of relenting. He's had enough! Have you ever been really sick and tired of someone? I mean fed up and frustrated beyond anything you had ever imagined? If so, then God has graciously given you a brief and tiny glimpse into his frustration with you. He made you for himself! He made you as a garment to be bound close to himself! But you are just a filthy rag! You keep loving other things more than you love him!

This is why the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Because so long as God is over here – and man is over there – God will grow weary of relenting. Nothing will ever change! We'll be caught in this cycle of rebellion and repentance, backsliding and

judgment forever!

She who bore seven has grown feeble – she has fainted away – her sun went down while it was yet day – she has been shamed and disgraced – and the rest of them I will give to the sword before their enemies. What can you do to get God to change his mind and have mercy on you? Nothing! You can do nothing. Judgment Day is coming. You stand at the edge of the abyss – with nowhere to turn!

Now by this I'll overcome – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Now by this I'll reach my home – Nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow; no other fount I know, Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

TEXT: Jeremiah 15:1-21

TITLE: REVIVING A DEJECTED MINISTER

BIG IDEA:

MINISTRY DISCOURAGEMENT BOTTOMS OUT IN SELF PITY UNLESS WE FEAST ON GOD'S WORD AND HOPE IN HIS PROMISES

INRODUCTION:

It is easy to become **discouraged in ministry** – especially when one is largely ministering on his own without the support of fellow team members. Jeremiah faces an extremely discouraging ministry challenge. He has been commissioned to preach a message that promises impending destruction, captivity and deportation – sprinkled with assurances of God's covenant blessing on a future remnant. It has become evident that God's patience and forbearance have reached the breaking point. Judah is beyond the point of recovery. The sword of the guillotine hanging over the head of the nation is about to fall. In addition, even his own neighbors have turned against him and are cursing him for bringing this unpopular message. His heart grieves for both national sin (with which he identifies) with its consequences and for his own personal suffering. This passage provides insight into his self-talk and his quarrel with God as he wrestles with his situation and receives encouragement from the God who commissioned him for service. There is some parallel here to dealing with the 5 stages of Grief:

denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance

[cf. experience of Elijah in **I Kings 19:4**]

MINISTRY DISCOURAGEMENT BOTTOMS OUT IN SELF PITY UNLESS WE FEAST ON GOD'S WORD AND HOPE IN HIS PROMISES

I. (:1-9) MINISTRY EVALUATION -- FACING REALITY – THINGS LOOK VERY BAD

Not saying that we should deny reality and look at ministry through rose-colored glasses. We need to be honest in our evaluation.

A. (:1-4) Ministry Has Not Produced Positive Results – Judgment and Destruction Rather Than Blessing and Edification

1. (:1) Don't Waste Your Breath Praying for Them – Send Them Away

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘Even though Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not be with this people; send them away from My presence and let them go!’”

Same instruction that the Lord had given in **Jer. 14:11**

Not the answer to prayer that Jeremiah expected from his godly prayer at the end of chap. 14

Mackay: noted figures from the past who had acted as intercessors on behalf of the people, and been instrumental in averting the Lord's judgment from coming upon them. Moses is twice specifically described as praying to God on behalf of others (**Num. 21:7; Deut. 9:20**), and in other passages intercession is clearly implied (**Exod. 32:11-14, 31-34; Num. 14:13-19**). So too Samuel is three times described as praying to the Lord for others (**1 Sam. 7:5; 12:19, 23**). Moses and Samuel are also mentioned together in **Ps. 99:6** as individuals whom the Lord had answered when they called on his name, and they are linked in a similar way in **Ezek. 14:14**.

Language of the Exodus is reversed here – “*send them away*”

2. (:2-3) Destined for Death and Destruction – No Hope of Escape

“And it shall be that when they say to you, 'Where should we go?' then you are to tell them, 'Thus says the LORD: "Those destined for death, to death; And those destined for the sword, to the sword; And those destined for famine, to famine; And those destined for captivity, to captivity." 'And I shall appoint over them four kinds of doom," declares the LORD: 'the sword to slay, the dogs to drag off, and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.'”

2 lists of 4 destinies / dooms:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 1) death | 1) the sword to slay |
| 2) sword | 2) dogs to drag off |
| 3) famine | 3) birds of the sky |
| 4) captivity | 4) beasts of the earth to devour and destroy |

Mackay: It is a picture of horrific and unmitigated slaughter.
Cf. **Lev. 26** for similar list of multiple disasters due to sin

3. (:4) Designated as an Object of Horror

“And I shall make them an object of horror among all the kingdoms of the earth because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, for what he did in Jerusalem.”

Nation of Israel was intended to be a trophy of God's glory and grace that would attract the other nations to the worship of the true God

Thompson: The responsibility of Manasseh son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for at least some of Judah's apostasy is referred to. Various passages in 2 Kings refer to the wickedness of this king (**2 Ki. 21:10-15; 23:26; 24:3**). . . Manasseh was the most syncretistic of all the Davidic kings and had a profound influence on the nation (**2 Ki. 21**).

Parunak: Though Manasseh removed the pagan altars from the temple, there is no record that he destroyed them, and in fact they must have survived, for Josiah later destroyed them, **2 Kings 23:12**.

B. (:5-9) Mission Field Littered with Lost Causes

1. (:5) Forgotten and Abandoned

*“Indeed, who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem,
Or who will mourn for you,
Or who will turn aside to ask about your welfare?”*

Mackay: There is probably a conscious contrast with the scene in **Ps. 122:6-9** which focuses on prayers for the peace (*shalom*) of Jerusalem. Here there is so little concern for her that people cannot be bothered to spare a moment to ask how she fares.

2. (:6-7) Rebellious and Unrepentant

“You who have forsaken Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘You keep going backward. So I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am tired of relenting! And I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the gates of the land; I will bereave them of children, I will destroy My people; They did not repent of their ways.’”

Agricultural metaphor of the winnowing fork so that the chaff would blow away

3. (:8-9) Distressed and Dismayed / Shamed and Humiliated

“Their widows will be more numerous before Me than the sand of the seas; I will bring against them, against the mother of a young man, A destroyer at noonday; I will suddenly bring down on her anguish and dismay. She who bore seven sons pines away; Her breathing is labored. Her sun has set while it was yet day; She has been shamed and humiliated. So I shall give over their survivors to the sword before their enemies,’ declares the LORD.”

Images of a widow (bereaved of her husband) and a mother (bereaved of her children)

II. (:10-11) MINISTRY LAMENT – “WOE IS ME” – SELF PITY

A. (:10) Undeserved Rejection

“Woe to me, my mother, that you have borne me as a man of strife and a man of contention to all the land! I have neither lent, nor have men lent money to me, Yet everyone curses me.”

Mackay: Lending and borrowing are frequent sources of strife, but Jeremiah presents himself as not having engaged in activity that gave rise to this ordinary sort of trouble.

Jeremiah is definitely down in the dumps and in need of encouragement

B. (:11) Hopeful Response

“The LORD said, ‘Surely I will set you free for purposes of good; Surely I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you In a time of disaster and a time of distress.’”

Better times lie ahead;

Cursing by your own people will be turned around to such an extent that even your enemies will at some point seek you out for assistance

Constable: Jeremiah would emerge from this catastrophe a tower of strength. The Lord had similarly encouraged His prophet previously (**Jeremiah 12:5-6**), after he had voiced his discouragement the first time (**Jeremiah 12:1-4**). And He would do so again, in the next pericope (**Jeremiah 15:15-21**).

III. (:12-14) MINISTRY GROUND ZERO – EXPERIENCING GOD’S FIRE

A. (:12) Powerless to Fight Back

“Can anyone smash iron, Iron from the north, or bronze?”

Somewhat cryptic – inability of Jeremiah to defeat the strong invading enemies that will be coming from the north

B. (:13) Plundered of Resources and Valuables

*“Your wealth and your treasures I will give for booty without cost,
Even for all your sins and within all your borders.”*

Mackay: “Wealth” refers to the resources at the disposal of an individual or nation. “Treasure” refers to valuables that are kept securely locked up. Both are divinely bestowed on the enemy as plunder/booty when they ransack the land. To the ancient mindset, the shame of being pillaged was as great as, if not greater than, the actual physical loss and abuse. This was because such a tragedy was interpreted as proving the ineffectiveness of one’s gods to intervene, or else that those affected have been rejected by their gods.

C. (:14a) Deported Into a Foreign Land

“Then I will cause your enemies to bring it into a land you do not know;”

D. (:14b) Torched by God’s Wrath

“For a fire has been kindled in My anger, It will burn upon you.”

IV. (:15-18) MINISTRY AMBIVALENCE – GOING BACK AND FORTH

Def. of **Ambivalence** = simultaneous and contradictory attitudes and feelings

A. (:15) Protestation and Petition

1. Remember Me

“Thou who knowest, O LORD, Remember me, take notice of me,”

2. Repay My Persecutors

“And take vengeance for me on my persecutors.”

3. Remain United with Me

“Do not, in view of Thy patience, take me away;”

4. Reward My Loyalty

“Know that for Thy sake I endure reproach.”

Mackay: the scorn and contempt displayed towards Jeremiah as a result of his fulfilling the commission the Lord has given him (**Ps. 69:7**).

B. (:16) Inspiration and Identity = Heart of the Passage = Basis for Encouragement – FEAST ON GOD’S WORD

1. Nourishing Value

“Thy words were found and I ate them,”

2. Joy and Delight

“And Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart;”

Constable: When the priests discovered God’s Word in the temple during Josiah’s reign (**2 Kings 22:13; 2 Kings 23:2**), Jeremiah had consumed it. He may have had a deep appreciation for God’s Word even before that event. Whenever Jeremiah began to relish God’s Word, it had become his delight and a joy to his soul (cf. **Ezekiel 2:8 to Ezekiel 3:3; Revelation 10:9-10**), in contrast to the majority of people who despised it (**Jeremiah 8:9**). The Lord’s words included His messages to the prophet, as well as His written Word. Jeremiah’s love for the Word was a result of God’s initiative-because Almighty Yahweh had called him to Himself (cf. **Jeremiah 1:4-10**).

3. Mark of Identity

“For I have been called by Thy name, O LORD God of hosts.”

Doesn’t immediately answer all of his perplexing questions or solve all of his problems

C. (:17) Isolation and Indignation

“I did not sit in the circle of merry-makers, nor did I exult. Because of Thy hand upon me I sat alone, For Thou didst fill me with indignation.”

D. (:18) Pain and Perplexity

1. Perpetual Pain

“Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?”

2. Deceptive Perplexity

“Wilt Thou indeed be to me like a deceptive stream with water that is unreliable?”

Mackay: Everyone in Palestine was familiar with the *wadi* which would be full of water during the rainy season, but soon dried up and had no flow of water in hot weather. Jeremiah, however, was the one who had been sure that the Lord was a fountain of living water (**2:13**), not like the heathen gods who could not be relied upon.

V. (:19-21) MINISTRY RENEWAL – GOD WILL DELIVER

A. (:19) Formula for Restoration

“Therefore, thus says the LORD,”

1. Return to God – Expecting fellowship and encouragement

*“If you return, then I will restore you—
Before Me you will stand;”*

2. Refine Speech – Focusing on what has value

*“And if you extract the precious from the worthless,
You will become My spokesman.”*

Mackay: refers to content of his speech ... worthy not worthless

3. Resist Compromise

*“They for their part may turn to you,
But as for you, you must not turn to them.”*

Thompson: The main thrust of the line is clear. The people are dependent on Jeremiah to hear God’s word, but Jeremiah has no need to heed anything they say to him.

Constable: The Lord replied that if Jeremiah would turn to Him, he would find restoration and renewed strength to stand for his God. Jeremiah had been calling the people to repent, but he needed to repent of his self-pitying attitude (**Jeremiah 15:15-18**). If he would purify himself inwardly (undergo a refining process), the Lord would continue to use him. Some of the people might turn to follow Jeremiah, but he must not turn to follow them. He must lift them up, and at the same time, not allow them to drag him down.

Bo Lim: God reminds Jeremiah that the suffering he has experienced is as advertised. Jeremiah then, is not to crumble in the face of adversity but rather redouble his commitment to his prophetic vocation. Persecution has not derailed God’s promise to deliver and vindicate (**verse 20**), and God reminds Jeremiah that his perseverance is the very vehicle by which the people are won over to repentance (**verse 19**). In the midst of injustice, Jeremiah is not to allow evil to overcome good.

Jeremiah 15:15-21 teaches that honesty and faithfulness in the midst of suffering are the hallmarks of prophetic ministry. The prophet's recommitment to his initial calling is the means by which God effects redemption in the world and reaffirms the promises of deliverance.

B. (:20a) Fortification Against Enemies

*“Then I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze;
And though they fight against you, they will not prevail over you;”*

Completely reverses the thrust of **vs. 12** where the enemies of Judah could not be defeated

**C. (:20b-21) Favor of God in Accomplishing Deliverance –
HOPE IN GOD'S PROMISES**

*“For I am with you to save you
And deliver you,’ declares the LORD.
So I will deliver you from the hand of the wicked,
And I will redeem you from the grasp of the violent.”*

Similar to the assurances given to Jeremiah in his initial commissioning to ministry

Thompson: Here then was a summons to turn again to renewed service for Yahweh accompanied by a reaffirmation of Yahweh's promise made to him at the time of his call. It was this strong assurance that enabled Jeremiah to continue his service for Yahweh down the years.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Under what circumstances do you tend to give in to self-pity?
- 2) When have you faced extreme ministry discouragement and where did you find encouragement?
- 3) How can we increase our delight in the Word of God?
- 4) What are some of your favorite bible promises related to sufficiency for ministry?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mackay: vv. 15-21 – In this section we have the second complex of Jeremiah's Confessions in which the prophet initiates a dialogue by announcing his complaint (**v. 10**) to which the Lord then responds (**vv. 11-14**). Jeremiah approaches God a second

time in vv. 15-18, after which the Lord recalls him to his duty and repeats the promises given to him at his original installation into office (vv. 19-21). . .

Surrounded as he was by strife and contention, the pressure had become too much for Jeremiah, and he gave way to dejection and spoke in a manner that was out of line with his commission and office. But challenged by God, he turned back, and knew renewed protection and blessing; indeed he was recommissioned for the ministry the Lord had allotted him.

Thompson: In vv. 10 and 15-18 Jeremiah is seen protesting that although he has been faithful to Yahweh in discharging his responsibility, this has only led to anguish and loneliness. Verses 10-12 can be seen as an outburst of Jeremiah (v. 10) followed by Yahweh's response (vv. 11-12). Then vv. 15-18 comprise a further lament and complaint from Jeremiah, with a response from Yahweh in vv. 19-21. Yahweh's word urges Jeremiah to discard his self-pity and to press on with his task. In that case divine assistance will be his.

A. C. Gaebelein: Jeremiah is overwhelmed. He pronounces a "woe" upon himself and declares that his mother has given birth to one who is a man of strife, of contention to the whole land. He has faithfully discharged his duty; he loved his people and they hated him beyond measure. Every one cursed him, as if he were a wicked man. What anguish of soul this implies! But then the Lord was near to cheer and comfort him, as He is near to us when we are in sorrow and all is dark and we are in despair. It would be well with him and with those, who, like Jeremiah, trust the Lord.

David Silversides: When It All Gets Too Much For Us – vv. 10-21

The best of men in this world are still sinners; only Jesus never sinned;
The Lord changes and corrects His servants;
Even the godliest of men can speak unadvisedly at times;
Jeremiah's prophecies interspersed with accounts of his own experiences –even
accounts of his own shortcomings

1. Faithfulness in the Cause of Truth Can Bring Trouble and Anguish (v. 10)

Christ did not promise His disciples an easy life; warned of the difficulties;
Even true disciples can be temporarily overwhelmed by troubles that come upon them;
Guilty of no more than telling them the truth of God; yet all around people despised him
and conspired against him; Why was I born if this is what my life is all about?
Under immense pressure; nothing good coming of his ministry that he could see;
What's the point of continuing in ministry?

2. Future Vindication Is Assured (v. 11)

vs. 12 is difficult – northern iron – all the defenses of Jerusalem would not stand against
the power of the northern invaders
eventually it will be evident that Jeremiah had been prophesying the truth

3. A Promised Future Blessing that Seemed Inadequate in the Present

But what about Now? I need help now; His faith was wavering;

Can experience serious discontent in the present;
The timescale was too long for Jeremiah (vs. 15);
Relished the Word of God (vs. 16); acknowledged that he was the Lord's servant, called by His name; identified with the indignation of the Lord against the sin of Judah;
Suggests that the fountain of living water seems to be drying up in his time of need;

4. The Necessity of Maintaining Distinctiveness (vs. 17)

Watch out for a blurring of distinction;
Don't make any concessions to the ungodly; the only movement must be the ungodly repenting and coming back to Jeremiah;
Then the Lord will preserve Jeremiah through it all (vs. 20)
Preach God's Word, not your own folly;

Jose F Maldonado – Certain Judgment

I. The Continuation of Judgment: (vss 1 - 4)

- A. The Different Position. (vs 1)
- B. The Disturbing Proclamation (vs 2)
- C. The Destructive Proclamation. (vs -3)
- D. The Dispersion Pronounced. (vs -4)

II. The Certainty of Judgment: (vss 5 - 9)

- A. The Sad Despondency. (vs 5)
- B. The Sure Destruction. (vs 6)
- C. The Sorrow Declared. (vss 7 - 9)
 1. Society Destroyed. (vs 7)
 2. Sudden Destruction. (vs 8)
 3. Startling Destruction. (vs 9)

III. The Contention of Judgment: (vss 10 - 14)

- A. The Condition of Jeremiah. (vs 10)
 1. His Pain. (vs 10a)
 2. His Purity. (vs 10b)
- B. The Compliance of Jeremiah. (vss 11 - 14)
 1. Concerning the Remnant. (vss 11)
 2. Concerning the Regency. (vs 12)
 3. Concerning the Resources.(vss 13 - 14)

IV. The Cry in the Judgment: (vss 15 - 18)

- A. Jeremiah's Plea. (vs 15)
 1. His Character. (vs 15a)
 - a. Remember Me. (vs15a)
 - b. Remain with Me. (vs15a)
 - c. Revenge Me. (vs 15a)
 2. His Concern. (vs15b)
- B. Jeremiah's Pursuit. (vs 16)
 1. He Devoured the Word. (vs 16a)

2. He Delighted in the Word. (vs 16b)
 3. He Disclosed the Word. (vs16c)
- C. Jeremiah's Purity. (vs 17)
- D. Jeremiah's Pain. (vs 18)
1. He was Dumbfounded. (vs 18a)
 2. He was Discombobulated. (vs 18b)

V. The Compassion in Judgment: (vs 19 - 21)

- A. The Prescription for Jeremiah. (vs 19)
1. His Repentance. (vs 19a)
 2. His Restoration. (vs 19b)
 3. His Righteousness. (vs 19c)
- B. The Protection for Jeremiah. (vss 20 & 21)
1. By God's Power. (vs 20)
 2. By God's Promise. (vs 22)

TEXT: Jeremiah 16:1-21

TITLE: *MAGNIFYING GOD'S NAME AND POWER*

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION MAGNIFY THE NAME AND POWER OF THE LORD

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes we look at God's judgments and can't see past the severity and the harshness of the resulting carnage. Certainly, Jeremiah's heart was broken with the impending calamities that were about to befall his beloved people. It was no fun to be called upon to deliver a message of doom and gloom – a message that not only brought personal persecution but now was going to be lived out by Jeremiah with the symbolism of some very drastic social deprivations in his own life. But in the midst of this messaging, God still offers up the hope of future restoration as He expands our perspective to focus on the more important goal of magnifying the name and power of our God.

Mackay: Jeremiah's own lifestyle was a living embodiment of what is going to happen to the people because of the disaster the Lord was going to bring on them. The Lord's messenger was to impress the reality of impending judgment on the nation using every means possible, even to the extent of making himself seem ridiculous and open to charges not merely of unsociability but one would suppose even of insanity.

JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION MAGNIFY THE NAME AND POWER OF THE LORD

**I. (:1-9) SEVERE LIFESTYLE FOR SEVERE TIMES –
3 PROHIBITIONS DESIGNED TO EMPHASIZE COMING JUDGMENT AND
MAGNIFY THE NAME AND POWER OF THE LORD**

A. (:1-4) Don't Marry or Have Children – Forbidden to Marry

"The word of the LORD also came to me saying,"

1. (:2) Command

*"You shall **not take a wife** for yourself
nor have sons or daughters in this place."*

Constable: The Israelites and ancient Near Easterners in general regarded the unmarried state and childlessness as divine curses (cf. **Matthew 24:19; 1 Corinthians 7:26**), but here God overruled what was normal (cf. **Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:18; Deuteronomy 7:14**) for a special reason. Bachelors were so rare in Israel that there is no word for "bachelor" in the Hebrew language. As an unmarried Prayer of Manasseh, Jeremiah would have been the object of much derision and scorn.

2. (:3-4) Reason – They Will Die Horribly

“For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bear them, and their fathers who beget them in this land:

*They will die of deadly diseases,
they will not be lamented or buried;
they will be as dung on the surface of the ground
and come to an end by sword and famine,
and their carcasses will become food for the birds of the sky and
for the beasts of the earth.”*

Ryken: Jeremiah’s singleness was symbolic of the judgment to come. It showed how much families would suffer on the day of judgment. Since parents and children alike would be reduced to carrion, it would be better for Jeremiah not to marry at all.

Stedman: It was to spare Jeremiah this additional grief that God forbade him to be married. This reminds you, does it not, of that word of Paul's in **First Corinthians 7**, where he says something similar: *“Now concerning the unmarried, ... in view of the impending distress it is well for a person to remain as he is,”* (1 Corinthians 7:25, 26 RSV). So God is saying to Jeremiah, "This is a time when these normal aspects of life need to be laid aside. The nation is hastening to its judgment -- the hour is approaching, crisis is coming -- and for that reason do not encumber yourself with burdens unnecessary to bear."

B. (:5-7) Don’t Go to Funerals to Mourn – Forbidden to Mourn

“For thus says the LORD,”

1. (:5a) Command

*“Do not enter a **house of mourning**,
or go to lament or to console them;”*

2. (:6-7) Reason – God Has Withdrawn His Peace, Lovingkindness and Compassion

*“for I have withdrawn My peace from this people,’ declares the LORD,
‘My lovingkindness and compassion. Both great men and small will die in this land; they will not be buried, they will not be lamented, nor will anyone gash himself or shave his head for them. Neither will men break bread in mourning for them, to comfort anyone for the dead, nor give them a cup of consolation to drink for anyone’s father or mother.*

Paul Rendall: The Lord was intending to take **His peace** from that people; His lovingkindness and His mercy. Surely this is the worst of all calamities. Surely this is what our sin deserves and how we ought to praise God in our hearts that His righteous judgment has fallen on our Lord Jesus at the cross.

Adam Clarke: “*cut himself*” -- A custom of the heathen forbidden to the Jews, **Leviticus 19:28; Deuteronomy 14:1**, and which appears now to have prevailed among them; because, having become idolaters, they conformed to all the customs of the heathen. They tore their hair, rent their garments, cut their hands, arms, and faces. These were not only signs of sorrow but were even supposed to give ease to the dead, and appease the angry deities.

C. (:8-9) Don't Go to Feasts to Rejoice – Forbidden to Feast

1. (:8) Command

*“Moreover you shall not go into a **house of feasting** to sit with them to eat and drink.”*

2. (:9) Reason – God Has Eliminated Social Occasions for Rejoicing Like Weddings

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am going to eliminate from this place, before your eyes and in your time, the voice of rejoicing and the voice of gladness, the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride.’”

Constable: Jeremiah was to reflect the attitudes of His God in all these situations. His withdrawal from village life pictured Yahweh’s withdrawal from His people.

Kidner: This, and worse (the message ran), was what life would soon be like for everyone: with families wiped out, reduced to carrion (**4-5**), and existence so bleak without God’s peace and love and mercy (**5b**), that it would lose even the faintest glow of human warmth.

Longman: These prohibitions lead to behaviors on Jeremiah’s part that are resonant with prophetic significance and therefore should be considered a prophetic sign-act that incarnates the words he is speaking. These prohibitions seem to be directed to Jeremiah himself.

II. (:10-13) **STUBBORN LAWLESSNESS JUSTIFIES JUDGMENT THAT MAGNIFIES THE NAME AND POWER OF THE LORD -- DESPITE PROTESTATIONS OF INNOCENCE**

A. (:10) Inquiry

“Now it will come about when you tell this people all these words that they will say to you, ‘For what reason has the LORD declared all this great calamity against us? And what is our iniquity, or what is our sin which we have committed against the LORD our God?’”

Thompson: **Verses 10-13** comprise a short lament in the form of questions (v. 10) followed by a short oracle of judgment upon the people of Judah (vv. 11-13), all in prose. It bears some resemblance both in form and content to **5:19; 9:12-16** and **22:8-9**.

Mackay: The puzzlement of the people tells its own story of religious insensitivity and total satisfaction with what they were doing (compare repeated questions in **Mal. 1-2**).

Paul Rendall: It is the sure sign of a wicked heart when it dismisses the conviction of sin, when it denies the fact of sin itself as not true, even though it can be proved.

B. (:11-12) Indictment

1. (:11) Family Sin – Behavior of Former Generations

“Then you are to say to them, 'It is because your forefathers have forsaken Me,' declares the LORD, 'and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law.’”

2. (:12) Personal Sin – Their Own Behavior

“You too have done evil, even more than your forefathers; for behold, you are each one walking according to the stubbornness of his own evil heart, without listening to Me.”

Mackay: Perhaps the intensification of their guilt is to be found in the idea of the increased and repeated warnings they had been given (**7:25; 25:3-4; 26:4-5; 35: 14-15; 44:4-5**), or it may have been a matter of regressing from such improvements as Josiah’s reforms had effected.

C. (:13) Indignation and Judgment

“So I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers; and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I shall grant you no favor.”

Wiersbe: The verb “*cast you out*” (**Jer. 16:13**) is used for hurling a spear or sending a storm against a ship (Jonah 1:4). God was violently removing His people so the land could be healed and the nation purified (**2 Chron. 36:14-21**).

III. (:14-21) FUTURE RESTORATION AND REJECTION OF IDOLATRY MAGNIFY THE NAME AND POWER OF THE LORD

A. (:14-15) Restoring Israel

“Therefore behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when it will no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.' For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.’”

Wiersbe: In wrath, God remembers mercy (**Hab. 3:2**), and Jeremiah gave the people a message of hope: The exiles will one day return to their land.

MacArthur: In view of the Lord's promise of restoration from Babylon, the proof of God's redemptive power and faithfulness in the deliverance from Egypt would give way to a greater demonstration in the deliverance of his people from Babylon. That bondage was to be so severe that deliverance from Babylon was a greater relief than from Egypt.

Parunak: Application: It is on promises such as these that the hope of Israel's restoration is based. The promise is not fulfilled in the return under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, for this is a return from "all nations," not just from the land of the north. It is also difficult to spiritualize, as a reference to Gentile conversion, for two reasons. First, it is explicitly described as a return to the land that was given to their fathers. Second, salvation of the Gentiles is described separately, and literally, in **19-21**.

B. (:16-17) Rounding up Indicted Lawbreakers

1. (:16) Apprehension

a. Fish for Them

"Behold, I am going to send for many fishermen,' declares the LORD, 'and they will fish for them;'"

Kelley: When Jesus used the metaphor of fishermen to describe the mission of his disciples (see **Mark 1:17; Matthew 4:19**), he was reversing its meaning from that intended by Jeremiah. Jeremiah's fishers caught men for judgment; Jesus' fishers caught them for salvation.

Longman: The use of these two metaphors makes clear that punishment will be comprehensive.

b. Hunt Them

"and afterwards I shall send for many hunters, and they will hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and from the clefts of the rocks."

Parunak: Description of the hunt. The people are like fish in the sea; the Lord will send many fishermen to catch them. They are like animals hiding among the rocks of the mountains; the Lord will send hunters to snare them. The image is that they will be rounded up in their land, and that no matter how carefully they try to hide, there will be so many people chasing them that they cannot escape.

Calvarycsd.org: The fishermen and hunters refer to the future Babylonian army which will beat the bushes for those who have tried to escape the catastrophe. The hunting and fishing metaphor is also used in **Ezekiel 12:13** and **Amos 4:2**.

2. (:17) Accountability

"For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, nor is their iniquity concealed from My eyes."

C. (:18) Repaying Iniquity

*“And I will first doubly repay their iniquity and their sin,
because they have polluted My land;
they have filled My inheritance with the carcasses of their detestable idols and
with their abominations.”*

“doubly repay” = hyperbole for full payment

D. (:19-21) Renouncing Idolatry

1. (:19a) Testifying to the Protection Afforded by God

*“O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,
And my refuge in the day of distress,”*

Parunak: vv. 19-21 -- Jeremiah's responds to this message of judgment.

Application: His response is appropriate for us.

a) First, he recognizes that **the Lord is his protection**, even in times of judgment. In this, he is perhaps responding to 15:10-14, the Lord's promise to care for him through the time of coming suffering.

b) Second, he recognizes that **God will bring good out of evil**. The statement about the Gentiles may be better rendered as jussive: "Let the gentiles come ... and let them say" If such judgment is to come on Israel because of their idolatry, let the Gentiles see it and take a lesson from it.

2. (:19b-20) Testifying to the Profitlessness of Idolatry

*“To Thee the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say,
‘Our fathers have inherited nothing but falsehood,
Futility and things of no profit.
Can man make gods for himself? Yet they are not gods!’”*

Stedman: One day the nations are going to see the result of their incredible folly, and come and confess to you the emptiness of all the things they had followed.

3. (:21) Testifying to the Power and Name of the Lord

*“Therefore behold, I am going to make them know-- This time I will
make them know My power and My might; And they shall know that My
name is the LORD.”*

MacArthur: The result of God's judgment on the Jews will be the end of idolatry, even some Gentiles, witnessing the severity will renounce idols. After the return from Babylon, this was partly fulfilled as the Jews entirely and permanently renounced idols, and many Gentiles turned from their idols to Jehovah. However, the complete fulfillment will come in the final restoration of Israel (cf. **Is. 2:1-4; 49:6; 60:3**).

Parunak: Application: We as Gentiles should praise God for his grace in making room for us in his salvation, and at the same time not harbor ill-will against Israel, through whom we have been brought to faith.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is our call to be separate from sin so much easier than Jeremiah's call to refrain from participating in key aspects of social life in the community?
- 2) Where do we protest our innocence when the Lord is trying to convict us of sin?
- 3) In what ways can we better magnify the name and power of the Lord?
- 4) How has God proven to be our strength and refuge in time of pressure and trial?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thompson: The divine demand on Jeremiah was a severe one. Any member of a village was closely knit to the whole village in normal circumstances. When one of the villagers stood aloof from significant events like weddings or funerals, behaved oddly in that he did not seek marriage, embarrassed his village by exposing the national life as Jeremiah did, then he forfeited that basic social and psychological security which was the lot of every villager. Cut off from the support system which was available to members of a village, he was alone in the world. God was his sole support. Little wonder that when Jeremiah became convinced in his own mind that God was neglecting him, he laid his complaints against God in his "confessions."

Parunak: There are two ways to approach the structure of this chapter.

1. Formally, it is another interchange between Jeremiah and the Lord. The last interchange (in **ch. 15**) had a little of the flavor of an argument; this one, by contrast, is almost a duet, with them responding in affirmation with one another.
 - a) **1-18** YHWH -> Jer: I will judge, then restore Judah.
 - b) **19-20** Jer -> YHWH: Then the Gentiles will come.
 - c) **21** YHWH -> Jer: Indeed they will.
2. Thematically, there are two parts rather than three.

- a) The first is again **1-18**, and describes God's dealings with the nation of Judah, both in judgment and in restoration.
- b) The second is **19-21**, and deals with the future salvation of the Gentiles.

Ray Stedman: In these studies in the book of Jeremiah we have been watching the death of a nation. The kingdom of Judah slowly has been falling apart under the infection of evil which had spread across the face of this land, from the king down to the common people. It has been heading toward the inevitable climax of the judgment of God -- the invasion of the nation and the overthrow of the kingdom. This did not come about suddenly. Jeremiah's ministry lasted for over forty years, and God's patience waited throughout that time for any even last-ditch repentance. But the nation persisted in its evil, and eventually the judgment came as the prophet had predicted. Meanwhile, we have been watching God toughening his prophet, preparing him for the increasing deterioration of this nation. Things were getting worse and worse, despite the warnings and the preaching of this faithful man of God.

Jose Maldonado: The Fearful Judgment

I. The Grievous Condition: (vss 1 - 9)

- A. Marriage Prohibited. (vss 1-4)
- B. Mourning Prohibited. (vss 5-7)
- C. Merriment Prohibited. (vss 8-9)

II. The Great Condemnation: (vss 10 - 13)

- A. The Pronouncement of Judgment. (vs 10)
- B. The Patriarchs of Judah. (vs 11)
- C. The Punishment of Judah. (vss 12 - 13)

III. The Genuine Comfort: (vss 14 - 15)

- A. A Promise of Reprieval. (vs 14)
- B. A Promise of Restoration. (vs 15)

IV. The Grieving Compensation: (vss 16 - 18)

- A. The Sending of Judgment. (vs 16)
- B. The Seeing of Judgment. (vs 17)
- C. The Sureness of Judgment. (vs 18)

V. The Gracious Cause: (vs 19 - 21)

- A. The Sufficiency of God. (vs 19a)
- B. The Salvation of the Gentiles. (vs 19b)
- C. The Snare of Graven-Images. (vs 20)
- D. The Seeking of God. (vs 21)

Paul Rendall: God's Hand and His Might --

How does the Lord cause men to know His hand and His might?

He does it in 3 ways; ways which were ways of judgment in that day. But they also

declare to us in New Covenant times, His willingness to show mercy to all who will call upon His name. In the midst of God's heaviest judgments upon sinful people in this life, He still causes them to know His hand and His might, that they shall know His Name. To know His name savingly, is to come to find mercy.

You ladies know that in sewing tapestries and embroidered work that the backside of the garment often looks like a confused mess, but the other side is beautiful. The backside is very comparable to a picture of the Lord's judgments. His judgments seem awful to behold; and sometimes they even seem to make us think that He will never show mercy. But as the Master's hand skillfully uses the needle, on the tapestry of the lives of His elect people, it will produce a beautiful and lasting result on the other side. This is His special and beautiful work of saving your soul and bringing you to eternal glory.

1. (:1-9) By taking away His blessings from them.
2. (:10-13) By showing them the connections between sin and judgment.
3. (:14-21) By hunting and fishing for them.

Chris Reeves:

Jeremiah 16 Outline

- Directions for Jeremiah (16:1-13)
 - Do not marry (16:1-4)
 - Do not mourn (16:5-9)
 - Preach to the people (16:10-13)
- Explanation to Jeremiah (16:14-18)
 - Restoration will come (16:14-15)
 - Punishment will come first (16:16-18)
- Affirmation by Jeremiah (16:19-21)
 - Jeremiah's faith (16:19-20)
 - Jehovah's might (16:21)

TEXT: Jeremiah 17:1-27

TITLE: MAJOR IN THE ESSENTIALS

BIG IDEA:

**SPIRITUAL SUCCESS DEPENDS ON THE RIGHT ORIENTATION
TOWARDS THE MAJOR THEMES OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes in studying the Bible we get off on rabbit trails that deal with obscure and seemingly insignificant issues. In this chapter we see Jeremiah focusing on the **major themes** of our relationship with God. These are the **Big Deal Issues** that are impacting the lives of his countrymen and heading them down the path to imminent judgment and exile into Babylon. These subject areas are not electives in our pursuit of the knowledge of God. These are the **foundational areas**, the **core curriculum** that must be mastered to enjoy spiritual blessing and prosperity.

**SPIRITUAL SUCCESS DEPENDS ON THE RIGHT ORIENTATION
TOWARDS THE MAJOR THEMES OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD –
5 MAJOR THEMES ADDRESSED HERE**

I. (:1-4) SIN AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

A. (:1-2) Lasting Stain of Sin

*“The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus;
With a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart,
And on the horns of their altars,
As they remember their children, so they remember their altars and their
Asherim by green trees on the high hills.”*

No mistaking what constitutes sin; no glossing over sin; no ignoring the accountability associated with sin

Contrast the removal of our sins in Christ with the permanence of the recording of sins here. Repentance and faith are the keys.

Parunak: Their sin is also written on the horns of the altar. Thus the altar, which ought to be an instrument of forgiveness, bearing sacrifices to atone for their sin, has instead become a testimony against them. Instead of proclaiming forgiveness, it proclaims their sin.

Mackay: The horns of the altar were stone projections, one at each of the top corners of the altar. They performed the utilitarian role of stabilizing the sacrifice being burned on the altar, but more significantly when sacrifices for atonement were presented, blood was smeared on these horns to indicate the propitiatory nature of the sacrifice (**Exod. 27:2; 29:12; 30:1-3; Lev. 4:7, 30, 34; 8:15; 16:18**).

Constable: The indictment against Judah for her deeply ingrained sins was written permanently on the people's hearts (cf. **Job 19:24**). It stood etched there and, also figuratively, on their most prominent places of worship, the pagan altars throughout the land. Sins engraved on the heart pictures the chief characteristic that marked the inner life of the people, which was indelible sin. When Yahweh had given Israel the covenant at Mount Sinai, He inscribed it on tablets of stone (**Exodus 24:12; Exodus 31:18**). But now, what was authoritative for the people was sin that they had inscribed on tablets of flesh.

Rather than blood, on the horns of the brazen altar in the temple courtyard, testifying to the people's commitment to Him, the Lord saw their sins staining the horns of their pagan altars (cf. **Jeremiah 7:21-26; Amos 4:4-5**). The brazen altar was a place of sacrifice where their sins could be removed, but the horns of their altars had become places of sacrilege where their sins stood recorded.

Thompson: it seems clear that we have here (:2-3) a further reference to the prevalence of Canaanite worship throughout the land with its altars, sacred poles, and other paraphernalia of the cult.

B. (:3-4) Long Term Consequences of Sin

1. Loss of Property

“O mountain of Mine in the countryside, I will give over your wealth and all your treasures for booty, Your high places for sin throughout your borders.”

2. Loss of Inheritance = Removal from the Land and Servitude to Pagan Nations

“And you will, even of yourself, let go of your inheritance That I gave you; And I will make you serve your enemies In the land which you do not know;”

3. Due to God's Wrath

“For you have kindled a fire in My anger Which will burn forever.”

II. (:5-8) FAITH AND ITS OUTCOMES

Focus of Our Trust – Leads to Two Very Different Outcomes

A. (:5-6) Folly of Trusting in Mankind

1. (:5) Cursing Pronounced

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in mankind And makes flesh his strength, And whose heart turns away from the LORD.’”

Parallels with **Psalm 1**

Really only 2 approaches to life – like the tract: Two Ways to Live –

One is **God centered** with Christ on the throne;

The other is **man-centered** where we try to determine the best way to approach God and deal with our sins

Everyone has a faith orientation ... the key is the object of your faith

2. (:6) Outcome Described

“For he will be like a bush in the desert and will not see when prosperity comes, But will live in stony wastes in the wilderness, A land of salt without inhabitant.”

B. (:7-8) Fruitfulness of Trusting in the Lord

1. (:7) Blessing Pronounced

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD And whose trust is the LORD.”

2. (:8) Outcome Described

“For he will be like a tree planted by the water, that extends its roots by a stream And will not fear when the heat comes; But its leaves will be green, And it will not be anxious in a year of drought Nor cease to yield fruit.”

III. (:9-11) DEPRAVITY AND ITS MANIFESTATIONS

A. (:9-10) Fickleness of Our Heart

“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.”

Is man basically good? That is a fundamental issue that you must come to grips with.

Feinberg: If there is such blessing in trusting God, then why do people so generally depend on their fellow humans? Why is it that the blessed are not more numerous than the cursed? The answer lies in the innate depravity of the human heart (v. 9). . . In OT usage the heart signifies the total inner being and includes reason.

Ryken: This is one of the most powerful statements of human depravity in all of Scripture. The doctrine of total depravity means that every human being is sinful through and through. No part of the human person remains untouched by sin. The mind, the will, the emotions, and the conscience are all corrupt. So is the heart, which is the innermost core of the human person. It, too, is depraved.

Maldonado: The Condemnation of the Heart: (vss 9 - 11)

- A. The Heart is Deceitful. (vs 9a)
- B. The Heart is Depraved. (vs 9b)
- C. The Heart is Discovered. (vs 10)
- D. The Heart is Delusional. (vs 11)

B. (:11) Futility of Ill-Gotten Gains

“As a partridge that hatches eggs which it has not laid, so is he who makes a fortune, but unjustly; In the midst of his days it will forsake him, and in the end he will be a fool.”

How does our depravity manifest itself? Jeremiah could have focused on any number of sins. Later in the chapter he will look at how we break the command to keep the Sabbath. Here he focuses on greed and a materialistic mindset that is bent on accumulating wealth – even wealth that is gained unjustly.

Longman: The book of Proverbs also speaks negatively about the gaining wealth without working for it and also states that such gain will be temporary (**Prov. 11:4, 18; 13:11; 21:6; 22:16, cf. Ps. 73:3-6, 12**).

Parunak: (*YHWH*) I can, and I will reward people accordingly.

1. The Lord searches and tests our innermost thoughts and motives. “*Heart*” as the seat of reason; “*reins*” (“kidneys”) as the seat of emotion. We may not be able to know ourselves, let alone others; but the Lord can search us.

2. As a result, he will reward us appropriately.

3. The parable of the partridge illustrates this. Because the bird nests on the ground, many of the eggs that it lays are never hatched. So the wealthy sinner will not enjoy the fruit of his wickedness. “*He shall leave them in the midst of his days*” because he will be taken into exile.

4. Application: We must trust the Lord with our hearts! Our faith is not to be in our works; it’s also not to be in our faith, since we can’t adequately assess our own faith. We find our refuge only in God.

Alternative view of partridge parable:

Guzik: According to the ancient proverb, a partridge sits upon the eggs of other birds. When they do hatch, the chicks leave the partridge because they don’t really belong to that bird. Even so, riches will leave a man when he stands before God in judgment. In the end he will be shown to be a fool for trusting in his ill-gotten gains.

MacArthur: This referred to a sand grouse which invaded and brooded over a nest not its own, but was forced to leave before the eggs hatched. It depicted a person who unjustly took possession of things he had no right to take and couldn’t enjoy the benefits, despite all the effort.

Wiersbe: What good would their wealth be when the judgment fell on the land?

Longman: This section (:5-11) is distinguished from what follows since these sayings

are attributed to Yahweh himself, followed by a speech directed to Yahweh from the prophet himself **verses 12-16**.

IV. (:12-18) FAITHFULNESS AS THE FOUNDATION FOR WORSHIP

A. (:12-13) Hymn of Praise and Accountability

1. (:12) Majesty of God's Reign Must Be Reflected in Worship

"A glorious throne on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary."

Never forget that God created man to enjoy him and worship him forever. We are off the rails whenever we substitute anything else for the genuine worship of the one true God who exists from all eternity as the Majestic Sovereign of the Universe.

Feinberg: In these verses Jeremiah extols the majesty of God. True permanence, since unjustly gained riches are fleeting, is found only in the Lord.

2. (:13) Magnitude of Spiritual Adultery Reflected in God's Unique Identity

"O LORD, the hope of Israel, All who forsake Thee will be put to shame. Those who turn away on earth will be written down, Because they have forsaken the fountain of living water, even the LORD."

- Unique as the One Hope of Israel
- Unique as the Fountain of Living Water

Longman: Thy hymnic introduction continues in a way that begins to turn toward the subject of the petition (another reason to think that hymn and petition belong together). Yahweh is called the **hope of Israel**, the one who can lead Israel from death to life. Those who turn their back on Yahweh, however, will be put to **shame**, the same verb found in **verse 18** where Jeremiah asks God to put to shame his persecutors and to keep him from shame.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOURCE OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE – DESCRIBED AS A FOUNTAIN

I. AUTHENTIC SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Genuine; exclusive; unique

John 4:24 *"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."*

John 14:6 *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."*

II. AVAILABLE (ACCESSIBLE) SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

We are commanded to come to the waters and freely drink

John 4:10 *"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water."*

III. ACTIVE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Produces spiritual life and vitality

John 4:42 *“This One is indeed the Savior of the world.”*

IV. ABUNDANT SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

No limit to its provision or to its depth or fullness

More than merely adequate or sufficient

V. ABIDING SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Continuing, enduring, permanent

John 4:14 *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life.”*

VI. AWESOME SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Should evoke our worship and praise

John 4:29 *“Come, see a man who told me all the things that I have done; this is not the Christ, is it?”*

CONCLUSION:

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink, He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke of the Spirit . . .”

John 7:37-39

B. (:14-18) Lament of Vulnerability Despite Faithfulness

1. (:14-16) Personal Testimony of His Suffering and Loyalty

a. (:14) Injuries of the Prophet – He needs healing himself

“Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; Save me and I will be saved, For Thou art my praise.”

Mackay: does not refer to a physical malady but harks back to Jeremiah’s perception of himself as the one who is spiritually wounded and distressed (**15:18**). The prophet is sure that the only healing that will be effective for his condition is that which comes from the Lord (**Pss. 6:3; 30:3**). The words were obviously spoken at a time of dejection and depression but even so Jeremiah has not given up looking to the Lord alone as the one who can help. Though he is still in spiritual perplexity and despair, there remains (unlike **15:18**) an underlying note of confidence in the Lord.

b. (:15) Inquisition of the Prophet – Disrespecting his message

“Look, they keep saying to me, “Where is the word of the LORD? Let it come now!””

Thompson: Jeremiah goes on to quote his scoffers who ask, probably sarcastically, for some evidence of God’s action. It was imperative that Yahweh should show his hand one way or another, either in deliverance for Jeremiah or in judgment on the scoffers or both (cf. **Isa. 5:19**). The scoffers throw back at Jeremiah the claim he often made that he was delivering the word of Yahweh. That word was at times joy and happiness to

him (15:16), but at times it brought trouble upon him (20:8). The prolonged lack of confirmation of his message exposed him to ridicule and filled him with despair.

c. (:16) Integrity of the Prophet

1) Faithfulness as a Shepherd of God's Flock

"But as for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd after Thee,"

2) Compassion for God's People in Light of Coming Judgment

"Nor have I longed for the woeful day;"

Mackay: "*day of despair*" – describes the ultimate disaster that would irrevocably spell the end of their nationhood. Jeremiah had not carried out his mission because he wished ill on the people and anted such judgment to come upon the country.

3) Transparency and Authenticity Before God

"Thou Thyself knowest the utterance of my lips was in Thy presence."

Guzik: In a series of brief statements, Jeremiah defended and justified his ministry before God. He did this to contrast himself with those who demanded God bring immediate revelation and resolution.

Wiersbe: Except for one episode of unbelief (**Jer. 15:15-21**), Jeremiah had not tried to run away from his responsibilities nor had he altered the messages God had given him to deliver. But he needed God's help and protection, and the Lord answered his prayers.

2. (:17-18) Prayer for Protection and Vindication

"Do not be a terror to me; Thou art my refuge in the day of disaster. Let those who persecute me be put to shame, but as for me, let me not be put to shame; Let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed. Bring on them a day of disaster, and crush them with twofold destruction!"

Mackay: "*refuge*" (**Ps. 46:2**) is the defensive or external aspect of salvation, corresponding to human insecurity and inability to fend for oneself in the face of hostility.

V. (:19-27) OBEDIENCE (SPECIFICALLY SABBATH KEEPING) AND ITS BLESSINGS AND JUDGMENTS

A. (:19-20) Call to Attention

"Thus the LORD said to me, 'Go and stand in the public gate, through which the kings of Judah come in and go out, as well as in all the gates of Jerusalem; and say to them, 'Listen to the word of the LORD, kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all inhabitants of Jerusalem, who come in through these gates:'"

Parunak: v. 19, “Go.” Are we passive or active in our service to God? What have we done this week, not just through the press of circumstance, but in direct and conscious obedience to him? If nothing, perhaps we have only come to him, and not yet gone forth.

B. (:21-23) Command to Keep the Sabbath Violated

1. (:21-22) The Command Repeated

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Take heed for yourselves, and do not carry any load on the sabbath day or bring anything in through the gates of Jerusalem. And you shall not bring a load out of your houses on the sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers.’”

2. (:23) The Violation Cited

“Yet they did not listen or incline their ears, but stiffened their necks in order not to listen or take correction.”

C. (:24-27) Contrast Between the Associated Blessing and Judgment

1. (:24-26) Blessing for Keeping the Sabbath

“‘But it will come about, if you listen attentively to Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘to bring no load in through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but to keep the sabbath day holy by doing no work on it, then there will come in through the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city will be inhabited forever. They will come in from the cities of Judah and from the environs of Jerusalem, from the land of Benjamin, from the lowland, from the hill country, and from the Negev, bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of the LORD.’”

Cf. Is. 58:13-14

Ryken: God promised three blessings in particular for keeping the Sabbath:

- A royal blessing (:24-25) – the very survival of the monarchy rested upon Sabbath-observance.
- A civic blessing (:25b) – Jerusalem would be “inhabited forever” – the gates of the city would remain open for people to come and go with their goods.
- A national blessing (:26) – the whole nation would come home to give praise and honor to God

2. (:27) Judgment for Violating the Sabbath

“But if you do not listen to Me to keep the sabbath day holy by not carrying a load and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I shall kindle a fire in its gates, and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and not be quenched.”

Feinberg: In summary, the Sabbath:

- (1) Recognizes God as Creator, which is a witness against idolatry, and
- (2) Marks the special covenant relationship between God and Israel.

If obedience is forthcoming (v. 24), the blessings are distinctive:

First, the continuance of the Davidic dynasty is assured (v. 25).

Second, Jerusalem will be settled and continue perpetually.

Third, the temple will again be the center of worship for the nation (v. 26).

Thus Judah is assured the promise of peace, prosperity, and permanence through her native dynasty and the authorized priesthood.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Compare vv. 5-8 to Psalm 1. What similarities do you see and what differences?
- 2) What is your reaction to the truth that only God really knows your heart?
- 3) How are we drawing near to Christ as the fountain of living water?
- 4) What should be the approach of a Christian today regarding Sabbath keeping?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: It was not just the fourth commandment that the people were responsible to keep, of course. Jeremiah might have chosen to preach on any of the other nine commandments, and he may have done so at other times. This message is probably representative of many similar sermons that the prophet delivered-calling the people back to obedience to the covenant. It was repentance that would postpone judgment, not just obedience to the fourth commandment. Yet the fourth commandment had special significance. Sabbath observance recognized Yahweh as Creator and Redeemer, and so witnessed against idolatry. It guaranteed God's people rest, which they could not obtain from idols. And it was one of the unique features of Israel's religion, because it signified the special covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel.

Mackay: Here Jeremiah points to the deep-seated, incorrigible wickedness of the human heart (v. 1, 9) that leads to divine condemnation and judgment (vv. 5-6). Though the inner recesses of the heart are hidden from public scrutiny, they are not concealed from the Lord (v. 10).

Thompson: Two concepts of special significance are expressed here (:25) – the throne of David and the permanent status of Jerusalem. Harking back to **2 Sam. 7**, Jeremiah both here and in other passages (**23:5-6; 30:9; 33:15**) affirms the ancient belief that David's throne would persist. If it was temporarily suspended it would be restored, even though some of the kings were unworthy of that honor (**22:30**). Jerusalem, likewise, was the place where God had chosen to place his royal throne, and even if it were destroyed it would be restored and inhabited forever (cf. **Zech. 2:2-12); 8:3, 15; 14:11**). The security of the state would be guaranteed to the people if they kept the covenant.

Ryken: Three curses befall the self-reliant – loneliness, poverty, and death.

- Loneliness v. 6
- Poverty v. 11
- Death v. 13

David Silversides: The Sabbath as an Indicator of Faith (:19-27)

What is our attitude towards God's holy day?

Stems from creation; imbedded in 10 Commandments;

Is. 56:6 – Gentiles will observe; associated with loving the Lord and delighting in the Lord;

Is. 58:13 – right manner of observance

Book of Amos – outwardly observed but thoroughly disliked as a burden and nuisance; hearts set at getting back to their dishonest business

Neh. 13:18

Abused by Pharisees – corrected by Christ in the gospels

We believe in justification by faith ... so what is the importance of this command?

A justified sinner will begin to love the Lord; we don't love Him as we ought to or as we fully will in glory

Telling a lot of people what they did not want to hear (vs. 19)

Jeremiah was to preach at all the gates of Jerusalem; not a popular message;

Made him a man of contention to the whole earth (**15:10**);

Told that his ministry would be largely negative – to pull down

Don't enter the gospel ministry without understanding that this is your calling = to

preach a message men do not want to hear; world is hostile to truth;

A man who is a servant of men cannot be a servant of Christ (**Gal. 1:9ff**);

Never accommodate your message to please men

Peter Wallace: The Blessed Man is Lord of the Sabbath

Jeremiah 17 ends on a very strange note. This is deeply perplexing. Jeremiah has been saying – “time's up” – there is nothing you can do to save Jerusalem. But now, all of a sudden, God says that if they would keep the Sabbath then he will spare the city. You want to save Jerusalem? Okay, fine, then keep the Sabbath holy!

What is going on? Is there, in fact, a way to save Jerusalem? Yes, there is. If Israel becomes all that Israel is supposed to be – if the people of God do all that the people of

God are supposed to do – then not only will God spare Jerusalem, but he will establish the throne of David forever. And this is especially exemplified in Sabbath-keeping. I have titled the sermon, “The Blessed Man Is Lord of the Sabbath,” because of the way that Jesus fulfills the Fourth Commandment. Jesus fulfills all of the commandments – but Jesus highlights the Fourth Commandment in the way that he declares “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

The Sabbath was established at creation, when God rested on the seventh day and hallowed it – he made it holy – he consecrated it. At Mt. Sinai God explained to Israel that this is why they should rest on the seventh day. If God rested on the seventh day, then God’s people should share in his rest.

In Deuteronomy God added another reason: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath.” (5:15) The Sabbath is rooted in creation – and also rooted in redemption. It is a day for imitating God’s rest – and a day for giving rest to the weary. This is why God highlights the Sabbath in Jeremiah 17.

Jerusalem has forgotten her Lord – the people of God are not entering his rest. And the people of God are not giving rest to others. If you are not spending the Sabbath day remembering God’s mighty deeds of creation and redemption – and if you are not giving rest to others – then there is no possible way for you to be loving God with all your heart, and loving your neighbor as yourself. But when you look at Jesus, you see the one who kept the Sabbath better than anyone else. Jesus rested on the Sabbath – both in his life, from week to week, and in his death (he rested in the grave on the Sabbath). And Jesus gave rest on the Sabbath – both in his life, as he healed the sick, and in his death, as he destroyed the power of death on the Sabbath! Truly, the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

God had promised through Jeremiah that if Israel truly kept the Sabbath he would deliver Jerusalem and seat the King on the throne of David forever.

But just as verse 25 speaks of the “throne of David” verse 12 speaks of how “A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.”

The first part of Jeremiah 17 is crucial for understanding the latter part. The throne of David and the throne set on high from the beginning are one and the same. Earlier we sang Psalm 1 – “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked” “He will be a tree planted by streams of water” I don’t know whether Psalm 1 was written as a reflection on Jeremiah 17, or whether Jeremiah 17 was written as a reflection on Psalm 1 – but plainly they were intended to be heard and sung together. The blessed man of Psalm 1 is clearly connected with the Davidic king in Psalm 2. Should we also see the Davidic king in Jeremiah 17? By now it should be clear that Jeremiah holds out no hope for Judah as a whole. The people of God are doomed to judgment. There is no escape.

1. The Prophet's Indictment of Judah: They Do Not Trust the LORD (1-13)

a. "Written with a Pen of Iron" – the Generational Character of Sin (v1-2)

"The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars, 2 while their children remember their altars and their Asherim, beside every green tree and on the high hills, 3 on the mountains in the open country. Jeremiah has just told them in chapter 16, 3 Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers. Jeremiah has been prophesying the coming of the exile. Judah has sinned against God. And because of their incessant rebellion against God, they are about to be sent into exile. And Jeremiah promises that when God delivers them from exile, that will be a greater deliverance than the Exodus in the days of Moses.

But then he says in 17:1 – The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart. Their sin is indelibly etched upon their hearts! It is really easy to apply this to ourselves! We see how our sin is engraved upon our own hearts. But this is not merely an individual problem. Too often we see our own individual sin as the "real" problem – and we don't think about the corporate nature of sin. Jeremiah says that their sin is also etched on the horns of their altars, while their children remember their altars and their Asherim beside every green tree and on the high hills, on the mountains in the open country We often think that sin is an individual matter, but Jeremiah reminds us that sin affects each other. There is corporate sin, when a people turns away from the LORD to serve other gods. And perhaps the most obvious form of this is found in the tendency for children to imitate their parents. My children have certain patterns of sin that they have learned from me! Judah's children are imitating their fathers in following other gods. In the days of Josiah (as in the days of Hezekiah before him) the high places were removed. But the people of Judah remembered "the good old days" – 4 the days when they worshiped Yahweh on the high places.

The PCA General Assembly last week engaged in a time of corporate prayer and repentance for the sins of our fathers in how we have treated African-Americans. We and our fathers have sinned. The idea that all sin is purely individual is an unchristian notion. And so God warns Judah that

b. Wealth as Spoil for Sin – the Fire of God's Anger (v3-4)

Do you hear this? The fire of God's anger burns forever against the rebellion of his people! And particularly, God says that he will use Judah's wealth and treasure as plunder. Whatever you love more than you love God will be taken from you – even God's own gift – even the Promised Land – if you love the Promised Land more than you love God, if you love the church more than you love Jesus – then what you love more than God will be destroyed.

So within a span of ten verses you have two opposite statements: I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers (16:15). (an echo of God's covenant promise to Abraham) And in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever (17:4).

Normally the word "forever" is used for God's covenant promises. When God shows mercy—that is the normal context for his "forever" promises. But here we are told that God's fire shall burn forever against his people. Why does God say this? This is why Jeremiah speaks of the two trees. Both of the trees are covenantal trees. The cursed shrub of the desert does not refer to the heathen nations. The cursed shrub of the desert refers to a portion of God's covenant people: As verse 13 says, All who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water. We are not talking about people who have never heard the gospel. We are talking about people who have "forsaken" the LORD – those who Hebrews 6 tells us have "tasted" of the heavenly gift – 5 and yet, have forsaken the LORD – the fountain of living water.

c. Cursed Is the Man Who Trusts in Man – the Desert Shrub (v5-6)

Verses 5-8 contrast the two kinds of trees: the cursed shrub of the desert who trusts in man, and the blessed tree by the water who trusts in the LORD. When heat comes, what happens to you? How do you respond to temptations and trials? You are driving down the road and someone cuts you off– how do you respond? Your wife makes a comment that sends you into a rage– why? You find yourself exasperated by your children. How do you respond to the "heat" of everyday life?

Our tendency is to respond like a shrub in the desert. The desert shrub is generally a prickly critter. Desert shrubs have developed defense mechanisms—thorns and briars—which are designed to keep animals away, so that they don't get eaten. The Hawaiian islands have taught us about how plants develop. There are no native prickly plants in Hawaii. The reason is simple: There are also no small mammals that are native to Hawaii. Since there are no predators to eat them, the plants never developed defense mechanisms! But we sure have! When the heat of life beats down upon us, our response is to develop defense mechanisms. And these defense mechanisms have become ingrained, so that we convince ourselves that they are natural, normal, and perfectly acceptable. 6 We all tend to respond to the "heat" of life by getting prickly– by being like a shrub of the desert.

And it is easy to explain:

- 1) we blame it on our parents (I'm just like my dad) The people of Jerusalem could have done this very easily! We are just like our fathers! But God says that this is the problem! Their children remember their altars and their Asherim. Blaming it on your parents won't go very far with God!
- 2) we blame others (the other guy made me do it) Adam and Eve tried that one. If only my wife would do X, then my life would be easier. Blame-shifting is quite normal—and quite deadly, because we never get around to dealing with the real problem.
- 3) we blame our circumstances "I had a bad day." Ever used that one? "I'm sorry, I had

a bad day at work..." "I didn't get enough sleep." Yeah, that's a good one. You can be irritable, mean, and nasty—and not really be at fault... Certainly when you are sick or tired it is easier to fall prey to sin. But sickness, tiredness, or irritability is never an excuse for sin—neither is it a cause of sin. But none of these external factors cause sin.

Verse 9 diagnoses us correctly: The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Our hearts would convince us that we are not really at fault for our sin. The first lesson you need to learn about yourself is that you cannot trust yourself. So long as we listen to our hearts and put our trust in man, we will never change. That is the lesson of Judah and Jerusalem. That is why the LORD says to Judah, in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever. So long as we trust in man, there is no hope. There is an ironic relationship between blaming others and trusting man. You might think that a person who blames others for his situation would be reluctant to trust in man. But in fact the reason why we blame others is precisely because we trusted them, and they failed us. If you trust in man— if you are looking to man for fulfillment and meaning in life— then when others fail you, your world will collapse. This is why you will only come to a true knowledge of yourself when you look into the Word of God, and allow it to interpret you.

c'. Blessed Is the Man Who Trusts in the LORD – the Fruitful Tree (v7-8)

So what do you do? You know that the Word of God is the answer, so you start reading your Bible, you pray, you get involved in your church. But nothing changes. Remember, these two trees are both covenantal trees. The cursed shrub in the desert is speaking of Judah as well. Verse 13 speaks of the LORD as the fountain of living water. And we often think that if we just had more water, then we'd change. If only we could read our Bibles more and pray more—that would change us, right?!

If you've ever been to the southwest, you may have seen the cactus forest of Arizona. Yes, there is a whole forest of cactus— so dense that if they didn't create pathways, you could never walk through it! They get a lot of rain in that part of Arizona. But it all comes at once, and so ordinary plants cannot survive. But the cactus thrives because it can soak up immense amounts of water at once, and then store it for the long dry season. Adding water does not change the nature of a cactus. Adding water simply multiplies the number of cacti!

b'. The LORD Judges Justly Those Who Get Riches Unjustly (v9-11)

We Reformed types like to emphasize the means of grace. But the Word, the sacraments, and prayer do not change us automatically. They only change us by faith – they only change us by the working of God's Spirit! Judah had access to the means of grace. A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. But Judah had forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water.

Too often our "claiming" the promises of God is still "me-centered." We want the means of grace to give us what we want. Jeremiah has repeatedly warned Judah that it is not enough to have the temple present. He had earlier said, "do not say, 'the temple of God'" – In other words, do not think that the means of grace will change you

automatically. You can live in Jerusalem and be a shrub in the desert.

So what is the solution? Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. Jeremiah 17 echoes the same themes as Psalm 1: Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drives away.

Jeremiah says that the one who trusts the LORD is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its root by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit. This tree is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the blessed man who trusted the LORD in all things. He is the tree of life, whose leaves bring healing to the nations, and he never ceases to bear fruit for God's glory. You see, apart from Jesus, you are a cursed shrub. But you have been grafted into him. Therefore you are no longer who you once were! Do you realize what this means? For the one who is "in Christ" it means that your sins are forgiven. You have been justified – you have been declared righteous in Christ. And every time you say to God, "Oh, I am just a miserable sinner," he says, "true, but that's why I sent my Son!" And when you say, "even my best is but filthy rags" Jesus says, "true, but I died to cover that as well" You need to start believing what God says about you! He says that you are holy! He says that you are righteous! (not in yourselves – but in Christ!) God says that in Christ you are righteous – how dare you still think of yourself as guilty? God says that in Christ you are holy – how dare you still think of yourself as a sinner. So long as you insist on affirming your "right" to be the final judge and arbiter of truth, you will only be exercising the sickness and deception of your heart – you will only be refusing to acknowledge the only true God as God – in other words, you will be an idolater!

If we would understand our deceitful hearts then we must come to the LORD and allow his word to interpret us. Too often we come to the scriptures and ask, "What does this mean for me?" That is backwards. That approaches the text as though we are the reason why God's Word exists. It is an expression of our idolatrous hearts! It is a function of the deceitfulness of sin, claiming that I am the center of the universe, and that all of God's revelation – all of God's purposes – revolve around me! Instead we need to come before the Word of God, and let it explain what we mean. The Word of God needs to interpret us– because I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds. (Notice again the importance of speaking of a judgment according to your deeds. As we've seen recently in Matthew's gospel, God's judgment is not based on our works – but his judgment is "according to" the fruit of our deeds.)

In verse 11, Jeremiah gives an example: 11 Like the partridge that gathers a brood that she did not hatch, so is he who gets riches but not by justice; in the midst of his days they will leave him, and at his end he will be a fool. The one who gains riches unjustly

will lose his riches in the midst of his days, and end his days as a fool. If you just read verse 11 by itself, you might say that it is not true. Many people who gained their riches unjustly die rich! But look back at verse 10. The LORD is speaking of the final judgment. You may die rich – but that is still only the midst of days! At your end, you will still die a fool!

a'. "Written in the Earth" – the Shame of Those Who Forsake the LORD (v12-13)

12 A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. 13 O LORD, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be put to shame; those who turn away from you[c] shall be written in the earth, for they have forsaken the LORD, the fountain of living water. The sin of Israel is written with a pen of iron. Now we hear in verse 13 that those who turn away from the LORD “shall be written in the earth.” The wages of sin is death. Jesus is the fountain of living water. If you forsake him, then you shall be put to shame. You will be publicly and openly humiliated. Jeremiah hears this, and he cries out to the LORD:

2. The Prophet’s Cry: Save Me from My Persecutors! (v14-18)

Verses 14-17 focus on Jeremiah’s plea for God to save him. Heal me! Save me! And he appeals to his fidelity as a shepherd. “I have not run away from being your shepherd, nor have I desired the day of sickness.” I’ve been faithful to proclaim your word of judgment – but that doesn’t mean that I wanted it to happen!

But then in verse 18, Jeremiah returns to the theme of shame: 18 Let those be put to shame who persecute me, but let me not be put to shame; let them be dismayed, but let me not be dismayed; bring upon them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction!

This is not just an Old Testament way of talking: As Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-8: 5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— 6 since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels 8 in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

But notice that Jeremiah’s plea for healing and salvation is in the singular. God told Jeremiah, “Do not pray for this people.” So Jeremiah instead prays for himself. God’s response is striking. Jeremiah has just prayed for deliverance – for salvation – for himself (not for the nation). But God’s reply is that Jeremiah should go to the People’s Gate – one of the gates of Jerusalem, and there proclaim that if the people keep the Sabbath holy, then God will save the city.

3. The LORD’s Reply: “Keep the Sabbath Day Holy” and I Will (v19-27)

a. I Told Your Fathers to Keep the Sabbath Holy, but They Refused to Hear (v19- 23)

So, Jeremiah, you want me to save you? Well, if Jerusalem keeps the Sabbath holy, as I commanded, 13 then I will save not only you, but the whole city! Of course, your fathers did not listen to me. They stiffened their neck. They preferred their own pleasure – they wanted to do their own thing. (read v24-25)

b. Sabbath-Keeping Can Save the City (v24-27)

But Sabbath-breaking demonstrates that you love your own pleasure more than you love God. In one sense, it's true that if Jerusalem had kept the Sabbath holy, then God would have spared Jerusalem from the Babylonians. But in another sense, there was no way that Jerusalem was ever going to succeed at this! Israel could not be all that God called Israel to be! Because God had called Israel to succeed where Adam had failed – but Israel was too much like Adam! And God had called the son of David to succeed where Israel had failed – but the sons of David were no better than the sons of Israel.

The only hope for Jerusalem is that God would come in the flesh, that the Son of Man would become Lord of the Sabbath, so that there would finally be a righteous remnant that faithfully kept the Sabbath holy – and thus entered God's rest! The Bible is not primarily about you. The Bible is primarily about Jesus. He is the tree planted by streams of living water. He is that rock that gave spiritual water for his people to drink. He is the second Adam, the true Israel, the Son of David – the one in whom all the promises of God come together.

When you read the Bible – read it to see what it says about him. 14 When you cannot sleep at night, don't worry about yourself! That is just your deceitful heart trying to convince you that you are the center of the universe! How can you endure temptation? How can you produce good fruit in the midst of trials? It is not enough to pour water on a desert shrub and expect it to become a good tree. Adding water to a cactus will only produce more cacti. My only hope is that I belong both body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful savior, Jesus Christ, who has freely paid for all my sins with his precious blood, he also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head, indeed all things must work together for my salvation; therefore by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

TEXT: Jeremiah 18:1-23

TITLE: THE POTTER AND THE CLAY – HAVE THINE OWN WAY, LORD

BIG IDEA:

DON'T BLAME GOD OR HIS PROPHET WHEN THE CLAY GETS SMASHED FOR REFUSING TO YIELD TO ITS POTTER

INTRODUCTION:

Who do you choose to control your life? Will you grasp control into your own hands and think that you can forge a favorable destiny by your ingenuity and hard work? Or will you acknowledge your depravity and weakness and thankfully submit to the designs of the Master Potter who alone can fashion you into a trophy of His grace and glory? The age-old lessons of the Potter and the Clay that were communicated here to God's stubborn and rebellious nation of idolaters still hold true for us today – both individually and as a community, as a nation, and as a church.

DON'T BLAME GOD OR HIS PROPHET WHEN THE CLAY GETS SMASHED FOR REFUSING TO YIELD TO ITS POTTER

I. (:1-10) THE RIGHT OF THE CREATOR TO DETERMINE DESTINY COUPLED WITH MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

A. (:1-2) Setting the Stage for Visual Object Lesson

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD saying, ‘Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I shall announce My words to you.’”

B. (:3-4) Scenario of the Potter Fashioning Clay Vessels to Achieve Desired Product

1. (:3) Engaging in His Craft = Working to Make a Finished Product

“Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel.”

Parunak: “Wheels” – the double potter's wheel. The lower is a stone flywheel turned with the feet. The upper is a wooden platform on which the pot is formed. Spins quite fast.

2. (:4a) Evaluating His Product = Worthless

“But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter;”

Parunak: It got too thin, or too tall, or the wrong shape.

3. (:4b) Exercising His Creative Prerogative = Wanting a Different Outcome

“so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.”

Parunak: Because the clay is pliable, he can bend it where he wants it, and even lump it up and start over. Cf. **Rom. 9:21** – not speaking of separate lumps of clay, but of one and the same lump.

C. (:5-6) Sovereign Right and Power = Point of the Visual Object Lesson

“Then the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Can I not, O house of Israel, deal with you as this potter does?’ declares the LORD. ‘Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.’”

Parunak: God as the sovereign creator – **Isa. 29:16; 45:9; Rom. 9**. We have no basis to complain of what he has done to us. . .

God is able to respond quickly to people, as they respond to him. . . The point is not that God’s promises are conditional, but that he interacts with man, as the potter does with the clay, in order to accomplish his sovereign purpose. . .

- Lessons from the Potter
- Lessons from the Clay
- Lessons from the Wheel

J. Wilbur Chapman: The clay is not attractive in itself, but when the hands of the potter touch it, and the thought of the potter is brought to bear upon it, and the plan of the potter is worked out in it and through it, then there is a real transformation.

D. (:7-10) Scenarios of Different Destinies Based on Repentance vs. Rebellion

1. (:7-8) First Scenario: Decreeing Destruction But Will Respond to Repentance

a. (:7) God’s Plan

“At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it;”

b. (:8a) Change of Behavior

“if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil,”

c. (:8b) God’s Response

“I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it.”

2. (:9-10) Second Scenario: Decreeing Edification But Will Respond to Rebellion

a. (:9) God's Plan

"Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it;"

Feinberg: Verses 7-10 show that in his rule over the nations, God treats all of them with grace. He does not exercise his omnipotence arbitrarily or capriciously but conditions everything ethically

b. (:10a) Change of Behavior

"if it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice,"

c. (:10b) God's Response

"then I will think better of the good with which I had promised to bless it."

God does not act arbitrarily and independently of the heart response of his creation. God sovereignly determines destiny; But moral accountability and responsibility are not denied or compromised.

Parunak: We must not presume on God's purposes of blessing toward us, or despair of his promises of judgment. He does not wind the world up and let it go. Like a potter working with a clay pot, he is constantly pushing, pinching, watching how the clay responds to his actions and in turn taking the next appropriate action.

Theological Note: Note how the same image emphasizes two ideas that at first seem to be mutually contradictory: God's sovereignty over us, and his ability apparently to change our destiny in the midst of our lives. This is the crux of the great mystery of God's sovereignty – how it can coexist with our responsible and causative actions. Can't understand it, but both are true. This is why we speak, not of eternal security, but of the perseverance of the saints. The saved are those who die saved. Those who turn away and reject God, however intense their initial faith may seem to have been, are like a pot that started out for a vase and ended up a garbage pail.

Guzik: The lesson of the potter's house was not primarily, "God can do whatever He want." The main lesson is that God is free to respond to His people according to their own moral conduct and choices and previous promises do not restrict the exercise of His correction or justice. "Man is never at the mercy of an unfeeling deity; it is in his power to repent and align himself with God's beneficent purposes." (Cundall)

Mackay: The people had to grasp that there is no guaranteed connection between previous enjoyment of divine blessing, or awareness of divine promises, and future blessing unless there is ongoing obedience. If the people are recalcitrant, then the divine potter will be responsive to the way they are shaping up and, if need be, will

undo the good he has already bestowed on the nation and leave aside the blessing, starting out all over again until what is found conforms to what he wants.

II. (:11-17) THE REJECTION OF THE PLEA FOR REFORMATION BRINGS DIVINE REJECTION AND SCATTERING

A. (:11) Plea for Reformation

1. Identification of the Audience

“So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying,”

2. Indictment

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you.’”

3. Invitation

“Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.”

B. (:12) Stubborn Rejection of Divine Offer

“But they will say, ‘It’s hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’”

Thompson: Here is a sad reflection on the end result of evil-doing and of continuous breach of covenant. A state is reached where all desire and hope of repentance is lost and men are content to follow the uninhibited promptings of their own rebellious and wicked hearts. At this point judgment is inevitable.

Feinberg: With the issues so clearly presented, what was the nation’s reaction? The people claim it was hopeless to try to dissuade them from their ways (v. 12; cf. 2:25). Having gone too far to turn back, they condemned themselves. Their obduracy showed how deep-seated their love of idolatry was. What a disheartening response for Jeremiah to receive after all his pleading!

C. (:13-17) Unimaginable Apostasy Results in Astonishing Desolation

1. (:13) Unparalleled Unfaithfulness

“Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Ask now among the nations, Who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel Has done a most appalling thing.’”

Constable: As a virgin, she had done something appalling. She had polluted herself with the practices of pagan religion—including sexual immorality. She had played the harlot.

2. (:14) Dependability of Nature vs Surprising Adultery of Virgin Israel

*“Does the snow of Lebanon forsake the rock of the open country?
Or is the cold flowing water from a foreign land ever snatched away?”*

Adam Clarke: Lebanon was the highest mountain in Judea. Would any man in his senses abandon a farm that was always watered by the melted snows of Lebanon, and take a barren rock in its place? How stupid therefore and absurd are my people, who abandon the everlasting God for the worship of idols!

Longman: The unexpected should not happen. Snow is always on the rocky slopes of the high mountains of Lebanon. Cool water always flows from distant sources. And Israel should repent and worship the one true God, but it doesn't!

Wiersbe: Water in nature is consistent: On the heights, it becomes snow; at lower levels, it flows in the streams. God's people, however, were totally inconsistent, willing to enjoy God's blessings but not willing to obey the laws of God that governed those blessings.

Feinberg: Nature's reliability put to shame Judah's instability.

3. (:15-16) Disgraceful Idolatry

*“For My people have forgotten Me,
They burn incense to worthless gods And they have stumbled from their
ways, From the ancient paths, to walk in bypaths, not on a highway,
To make their land a desolation, An object of perpetual hissing;
Everyone who passes by it will be astonished And shake his head.*

Thompson: The term *seriqot*, 'hissing' or 'whistling,' denotes that the land would become a spectacle so shocking as to cause passers-by to whistle in awe. The verse is remarkable for its striking assonance, with its s-sounds conveying the impression of hissing.

4. (:17) Divine Rejection and Scattering

*“Like an east wind I will scatter them Before the enemy;
I will show them My back and not My face In the day of their calamity.”*

A. C. Gaebelein: If a nation is threatened with destruction and that nation turns to the Lord, He will repent of the evil pronounced upon them. This is fully illustrated in the case of Jonah's prediction, God-given as it was, of Nineveh's overthrow. Nineveh repented and the judgment was not executed upon that generation. But if the Lord has promised a nation good and that nation does evil in His sight, He will repent of the good He had promised unto them. Thus the potter's action is used to convey a great lesson, the lesson of God's sovereignty, to do as He pleaseth, yet always in perfect

righteousness. If Israel had owned then the sin and guilt and turned to the Lord, He would have acted in sovereign grace towards them. Their answer was: “*There is no hope; but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imaginations of his evil heart.*” What depravity and wicked boldness these words reveal! They refused to believe the message of the Lord. They pushed aside the hand which would snatch them out of the fire. They acknowledged the evil heart and deliberately declared to continue in wicked defiance of Jehovah. And is it any better in professing Christendom today? The answer of the Lord, an answer of kindness and long-suffering follows.

Mackay: The attitude of turning one’s back on someone was a gesture of displeasure with their conduct, and of estrangement from them, no longer having a desire to associate with them or be in their company.

Thompson: In a brief but powerful statement Yahweh’s judgment on a covenant-forsaking people is declared. Like the sirocco, the hot dry wind blowing from the eastern deserts (cf. **4:11; 13:34**) Yahweh would come as an *east wind* (the Babylonian armies). He would *scatter them before their enemies*, a reference to the impending invasion of the Babylonians and the dispersion of many of the people into exile far to the east (Babylon). In that day, he day of their disaster, Yahweh would offer no help to deliver them, for he would show them his back and not his face.

III. (:18-23) THE DEVIOUS REPRISALS AGAINST FAITHFUL JEREMIAH AND THE DIVINE RETRIBUTION

A. (:18) Reprisals Against the Unpopular Prophet

Definition of Reprisals: “acts of retaliation”

1. (:18a) Conspiracy to Attack Jeremiah

“Then they said, ‘Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah.’”

2. (:18b) Confidence in Alternative Spiritual Leadership

“Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor counsel to the sage, nor the divine word to the prophet!”

Parunak: They believe that their religious institutions (priest, wise man, and prophet) are sound, and that Jer. Is just a fanatic whom they can safely ignore.

Longman: Their reasoning is fascinating and often commented on because it seems to list three functionaries who are pivotal in teaching the people the will of Yaweh. These three groups include the priest, the wise teacher, and the prophet. Of further interest is the association between these three and their respective media of divine revelation. The priest is associated with the law, charged to teach the people the law from the moment of its and their inception (**Deut. 33:10**). The wisdom teacher is associated with counsel. This description of the wise is consistent with that we get in the book of Proverbs.

They are able to give advice to others. Finally, the prophet has the word, short for the word of God. The prophets speak oracles given to them by God. As the people reject Jeremiah and his message, they encourage each other by saying that they still have these vehicles of divine revelation. Get rid of Jeremiah and there will still be a conduit to the divine.

3. (:18c) Call to Action

*“Come on and let us strike at him with our tongue,
and let us give no heed to any of his words.”*

B. (:19-20) Record of Jeremiah’s Faithful Prophetic Ministry

1. (:19) Playback the Tape

“Do give heed to me, O LORD, and listen to what my opponents are saying!”

- Replay the faithful prophetic ministry of Jeremiah (“give heed”)
- Replay the unjustified treacherous scheming of his enemies (“listen”)

2. (:20a) Pull Off Another Haman

“Should good be repaid with evil? For they have dug a pit for me.”

Execute him on the gallows he had unjustly prepared for me

3. (:20b) Picture My Previous Intercession On Their Behalf

*“Remember how I stood before Thee to speak good on their behalf,
So as to turn away Thy wrath from them.”*

Kidner: His wound would have hurt less had he cared less and, paradoxically, prayed less for his people.

Longman: Since they have responded to Jeremiah’s good with such evil, his prayer of intercession on behalf of the people turns into an imprecatory prayer, asking for God’s judgment against them.

C. (:21-23) Retribution Against Jeremiah’s Treacherous Enemies

1. (:21) Specific Calamities for Specific Groups

*“Therefore, give their **children** over to famine,
And deliver them up to the power of the sword;
And let their **wives** become childless and widowed.
Let their **men** also be smitten to death,
Their **young men** struck down by the sword in battle.”*

2. (:22) Shocked Cries as They are Attacked for Their Treachery

“May an outcry be heard from their houses, when Thou suddenly bringest raiders upon them; For they have dug a pit to capture me and hidden snares for my feet.”

3. (:23) Sovereign Compensation for Their Treachery

“Yet Thou, O LORD, knowest All their deadly designs against me; Do not forgive their iniquity Or blot out their sin from Thy sight. But may they be overthrown before Thee; Deal with them in the time of Thine anger!”

Constable: The prophet asked the Lord to bring calamity on them for the calamity they planned to bring on him. Since they refused to repent and had tried to kill Yahweh’s messenger, let the invasion and all its horrors overtake them. Jeremiah was not requesting some special visitation of judgment on the people. He was asking the Lord to allow the threatened judgment, which he had been urging the people to avoid by repenting, to descend. They refused to repent. His strong request probably did not spring from wounded pride as much as from his identification with Yahweh and the demands of the covenant (cf. **Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28**). The Judahites had rejected God, and for this they deserved judgment.

CONCLUSION:

Adelaide Pillard (1862-1934) wrote a hymn for willing clay, the kind of clay that stays on the wheel to be shaped in the Potter’s hands:

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Thou art the potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way!
Hold o’er my being absolute sway!
Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

1) What personal applications do you take away from the visual object lesson of the potter and the clay?

- 2) How do we forget about our God and commit shameful words and deeds of unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery?
- 3) Why were the people so stirred up against Jeremiah?
- 4) How can Jeremiah justify praying for God's vindictive judgment against the people of Judah?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mackay: There would come a point when the time of gracious pleading with the intransigent would come to an end. Jeremiah confidently expects his adversaries to be dealt with in the ensuing time of the outpouring of divine anger. It may be that Jeremiah is here calling into effect the curses of the covenant. He sees himself as one who is loyal to the Lord and therefore deserving of his protection against those who unjustly oppose him. He has exposed the inequity of their action, and from a position of personal helplessness commits his cause to the Lord to intervene and rectify the situation.

Matthew Henry: The Sovereign Prerogative of God Divine Goodness and Equity --
I. That God has both an incontestable authority and an irresistible ability to form and fashion kingdoms and nations as he pleases, so as to serve his own purposes.

II. That, in the exercise of this authority and ability, he always goes by fixed rules of equity and goodness. He dispenses favours indeed in a way of sovereignty, but never punishes by arbitrary power.

Brandon Web: Life Made Over Again (v. 1-6)

I. God is the Potter.

- A. He is a person
- B. He has a plan.
- C. He has the power.
- D. He has patience.

II. Man is the Clay

- A. It is our composition
- B. It's greatest quality is that it yields – otherwise it becomes marred.

III. Life is the Wheel.

- A. The potter's wheel spins swiftly.
- B. Our lives are like the potter's wheel.
- C. Most important thing about a wheel is not its size but its center.

Stuart Olyott: Lessons from Jeremiah

People in this special nation which has received so great promises from God (including that of the Messiah who would come from the line of David) are abusing those

promises - -thinking that God would never judge them. Idols ... Immorality ... Filthy speech, etc.

Takes us to 3 places:

- 1) Potter's House –
- 2) Open Street – Jeremiah preaches a message and people respond; waste of time; continues to preach; response: kill him
- 3) Secret Place of Prayer – when he is under attack

4 Questions:

- 1) (:4-6) **Do you know that God can do whatever He likes?**
 - a. Potter does whatever he wants with the clay;
Can make completely different things from the same lump of clay;
 - b. Clay will never have the right to complain: Why have you made me like this?
He has mercy on whom He will have mercy
- 2) (:7-10) **Do you know what God likes?**

We do not worship the God of Islam who is distant;
God loves godliness; holiness; what is right; when you fall away, His blessing no longer rests on you; your actions matter;
you are responsible to live a life that is pleasing to God
- 3) (:11-17) **Do you know what God speaks about most of all?**

Mercy and Justice!
Sinners need mercy – can't wipe away your own sin;
Some people think that God is so harsh there will never be mercy;
Some people think that God is so soft there will never be judgment;
God speaks about both
- 4) (:18-23) **Do you know what God uses more than anything else to bring about His plan? Preaching and Prayer**

Jeremiah goes away to a secret place – the only place to go;
His prayer is prophetic for the downfall of Judah;
Their rejection of the Word of God is total

Ryken: **Jeremiah 18** should strike holy fear into the heart of every mortal. You are only a lump of clay, spinning and spinning on the Potter's wheel. The God who made you can destroy you without a moment's notice. Any potter will smash a pot in an instant if it bears the slightest defect. . .

Are you willing to trust the Potter? Do you believe that he knows best, designs best, shapes best, and fashions best? If you have given your heart to God, you can trust him to transform you into something useful and beautiful. If that seems hard to believe, it is because he is not even close to being finished yet. He is taking the time to work on the parts of your life that are still lumpy and off-centered. Some parts he may need to smash down and raise up all over again. Will you trust him – really trust him – to do what is best?

Peter Wallace: The Potter and the Clay

Psalm 35 – perhaps in the light of recent events we are beginning to learn how the imprecatory Psalms should be sung! When I was in college, I participated in an annual Mexico missions trip called “Potter’s Clay.” It was great. I think it was an excellent program. The leadership always emphasized how we were clay in the potter’s hand – how we should always be ready to become whatever God made us. But I don’t think that anyone ever talked about Jeremiah 18. Undoubtedly Jeremiah was familiar with Isaiah’s use of the image of the potter in Isaiah 45. God is the potter. Israel is the clay. God can do anything he wants with Israel. That was the theme of the annual Mexico Missions trip: God is the potter – we are clay in his hands – Let God make something special of you! So when Jeremiah gets sent to the potter’s house, undoubtedly Jeremiah knows what to expect! But watch the potter –

1. What Does God Say that We Should Do? (v1-11)

a. Watch the Potter (v1-4)

When a potter sees that the vessel he is making is not working, then he reworks it into another vessel, as it seems good to the potter. As Jeremiah watches the potter, the word of the LORD comes to him:

b. The Principle of the Potter and the Clay (v5-10)

Yes, God is sovereign. He may do with the clay whatever he wishes. This is certainly the point of Isaiah 45, when Isaiah speaks of the potter and the clay. But keep watching the potter – because there is more to the picture than that. We normally think of clay as passive. But if God wanted to use a passive image he should have used a different craft. Of all the crafts in the ancient world, the potter is the one whose medium is most active. The clay is spinning on the potter’s wheel. True, the potter is the one who spins the wheel! But the clay is moving, reacting – and sometimes the clay doesn’t do what you want! This is the strange and beautiful interplay of the sovereignty of God and the freedom of man. God is the one moving the wheel – God is the one molding the clay – and yet God treats us as clay. When we say that God is sovereign, that does not mean that he is arbitrary. He doesn’t put apples on a potter’s wheel – he uses clay! He is the Maker of all things – and so he uses all things according to the nature that he gave them. And sometimes, when the potter is working the clay, the clay doesn’t do what the potter wants, and so the potter goes with the flow and does something else. You might say, “Whoa, wait a second! Isn’t God sovereign?!” But remember the covenant that God made with Israel! Israel was supposed to love and obey the LORD – and live forever in the land! That’s what God had said that Israel was to do. So the clay (Israel) did not do what the potter (God) wanted the clay to do.

When God says that he will destroy a kingdom, there is still hope! If they turn away from their evil and do good, then God will relent of disaster – and the nation will be spared. But when God says that he will build up a kingdom, they should not become complacent! If they turn away and do evil, then God will relent of the good that he had intended for that nation. This is the familiar pattern of God’s covenant with man. Again, we need to distinguish between God’s decree (wherein God has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass), and God’s covenant. Jeremiah is not saying that God is

surprised by any of this. Rather, God has covenanted to act in a certain way. The general principle is that if you act in accord with the way God made things, then – generally speaking – good things will happen to you. If you act contrary to the way God made things, then – generally speaking – bad things will happen to you. And particularly, God has promised to do good to nations that obey him. And God has promised to destroy nations that disobey him.

And further, it is important to note that God is speaking here of “a nation.” While Judah is the particular nation in view here, the principle applies to any nation. If a nation turns away from evil and does good, then God will prosper them. If a nation turns away from good and does evil, then God will bring disaster on them. This is a general principle of human society that applies to all nations. Do good and God will prosper you. Do evil and God will bring disaster.

And if you think about it, this makes sense. God made the world to operate in a certain way. When we live in God’s world according to God’s principles, then things tend to go pretty well. But when we insist on living contrary to God’s principles, then things tend not to work as well. This is part of why I think that in the current political situation we would do better to focus on living well according to God’s principles. Over time, people will see the difference! And so Jeremiah cries out to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

c. The Call to Repentance (v11)

This is the normal covenantal call to repentance that you see in every covenant lawsuit. The prophet warns of coming judgment: here Jeremiah uses the potter’s language of ‘shaping disaster’ – the divine potter is molding and shaping disaster against Jerusalem – and calls Jerusalem to return to the LORD and amend their ways. This is the normal call – but Jerusalem is no longer listening:

2. What Does God Do to Those Who Hold Fast to Their Stubborn Ways? (v12-17)

a. The People Reject the LORD (v12)

I don’t know that this is a direct quote. I suspect that it is more a summary of the attitude of God’s people. Remember that! Because here we are not talking about a godless nation like Nineveh. We are talking about Judah – we are talking about the people of God – the church. God’s people have decided that there is no point in following God. “We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.”

This morning we talked about the importance of church discipline. We saw that church discipline is the responsibility of the whole church. If you are not showing your brother his fault – if you are not forgiving one another 70 x 7 – then you are acting according to the stubbornness of your evil heart.

b. And So God Turns His Back on Israel (v13-17)

[a] 5 Do the mountain waters run dry,[b] the cold flowing streams? What happens when snow leaves the mountain tops? It melts and feeds the cold flowing streams. If all

the snow melted, then the mountain waters would run dry. Why does Jeremiah use this as an image of such horror? Think about the Land of Promise. Canaan has lots of wadis – lots of narrow valleys that are dry most of the year, except when the rains come. Only the tallest mountains have snow all year round – and only the streams that flow from the tallest mountains have sufficient water to flow all year round. If the snow leaves the crags of Sirion, and the mountain streams run dry, then there will be no water in the Promised Land. But that is what has happened to the people of God!

15 But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway, 16 making their land a horror, a thing to be hissed at forever. Everyone who passes by it is horrified and shakes his head. Israel has rejected the ancient roads – the path of life – they have forgotten and forsaken the living God. God’s people have forgotten their God and have turned aside to worship false gods – false gods who made them stumble in their ways.

Jeremiah had spoken earlier in 6:16 of the importance of walking the “ancient path” – the good way – the way of life. But when you turn aside from the ancient paths and walk in side roads, you will stumble – everyone who has been hiking knows this! The old paths are there for a reason! If you want to get from point A to point B, then you want to follow a well-used path. There’s a reason why we use the term “rabbit trails” to refer to aimless diversions from the main point of a conversation. God had shown Israel the good way – the ancient path – that would lead to life. But Israel has followed rabbit trails.

The same thing has happened today. God’s people have turned aside from the ancient paths to follow rabbit trails. We live in a day where people crave experience – and do not care about truth. As long as we feel good, we’re good. This is not merely true of our culture – but also of the church. We do not care who God is – or what God says – we only care how God makes me feel. Why do I say this? Just look at how many churches have de-emphasized truth in order to focus on feelings! Experience and feelings are important – but it needs to be the experience of the true God! And how do you know whether your experience is true or not? How do you know whether your feelings are good? Remember the LORD – walk in the ancient paths.

What has God said? You need to know the scriptures – and what do the scriptures principally teach? “The scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.” You need to know who God is and what God has done. And you need to know what God requires of you – to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself. If you don’t – if you just follow your feelings – then God says: 17 Like the east wind I will scatter them before the enemy. I will show them my back, not my face, in the day of their calamity.” The east wind is the wind of judgment. The east wind blows hot and dry off the desert. The east wind never brings rain. Have you ever been in that situation? In the day of calamity – when everything was going wrong – you looked to God, and God turned his back on you! “Where is God when I need him?!”

Never mind that you had refused to love and serve God! How do you respond when God turns his back? If your response is to get angry and throw a fit at God, then you are demonstrating why God has turned his back. If you refuse to listen to God, then God will refuse to listen to you. And notice what happens next. The people do not like the message, so they go after the messenger:

3. How Should You Respond to Christians Who Refuse to Listen? (v18-23)

a. Verbal Assaults and a Refusal to Listen (v18)

Notice how the people use scripture to silence Jeremiah: “for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.” According to God’s covenant, these offices were supposed to continue forever. The priests had been appointed as custodians and teachers of the Law (Lev 10:11). The wise had given counsel to the king ever since the days of David and Solomon. And the prophets had spoken the word of the LORD for generations. Jeremiah has regularly said that these institutions had been judged by God and found wanting. So, according to the logic of the priest, the wise, and the prophets, Jeremiah is preaching contrary to God’s covenant promise. Therefore, if we are going to be faithful to God, then we need to ignore Jeremiah! This is the same logic that you hear today from those who don’t want God to judge wickedness.

In Jeremiah’s day, they wanted to ignore the prophet’s warning of judgment. “Let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not pay attention to any of his words.” You see the same thing today. People who claim the name of Christ are setting aside the word of Christ and are not paying attention to the warning of Jeremiah. God has said that sexual relations belong in marriage – and marriage can only be between male and female, because only male and female can “be fruitful and multiply.” And yet the mainline denominations are more than willing to ignore the word of the Lord and encourage wickedness to flourish. So how do you respond when Christians ignore the word of the LORD? Jeremiah’s prayer of complaint offers us a helpful model:

b. Jeremiah’s Prayer of Complaint (v19-23)

Jeremiah asks God to listen to both sides. Hear me. Listen to them. And see the difference between us. They have dug a pit for my life. But I stood before you to speak good for them, to turn away your wrath from them. Why has Jeremiah come under attack? Because he is trying to save their lives. Now, pay attention to what Jeremiah has been doing! Jeremiah has been preaching the word of the Lord. Jeremiah has been interceding for Jerusalem – at least, until the Lord told him to stop! But now, when the people declare that they will not listen – and when they decide to “strike him with the tongue” – to plot against him to destroy him, Jeremiah replies like this: Verse 21 speaks of the same three powers of death that we have often seen in Jeremiah: famine, the sword, and pestilence. 21 Therefore deliver up their children to famine; give them over to the power of the sword; let their wives become childless and widowed. 9 May their men meet death by pestilence, their youths be struck down by the sword in battle. Men, women, and children are all afflicted by the coming judgment.

Verse 22 then speaks of the reciprocity of God’s judgment: 22 May a cry be heard from

their houses, when you bring the plunderer suddenly upon them! For they have dug a pit to take me and laid snares for my feet. There are many Psalms that speak like this. The only shocking thing for Jeremiah's hearers is that Jeremiah is identifying them as the wicked! 23 Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

This morning we saw how Jesus taught us to forgive 70x7. How can Jeremiah say, "Forgive not their iniquity"? Some people take immediate recourse to the line, "Ah, that was just the Old Testament..." But Paul uses the same sort of language in 2 Thessalonians 1 – "God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." (2 Thess 1:6-8) And the saints under the altar in Revelation 6:10 cry out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth." It may sound strange at first, but you do not want God to forgive these people! Because they have refused to repent.

This morning I said that it was a good thing for the Charleston victims to forgive the shooter. And it was! But the shooter is in custody – and from all that I can see, there is no danger that he will be released any time soon! They have expressed their disposition of forgiveness toward the shooter. But none of them said, "Your honor, please release this fellow. He is now forgiven." The Charleston shooter is not forgiven! Unless there is genuine repentance on his part, the transaction of forgiveness is not complete. And so the nine souls under the altar still ask, "How long, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long until you avenge our blood?" They will be satisfied with the blood of Jesus! So if the Charleston shooter repents and believes in Jesus, they will rejoice! But if he does not repent and believe in Jesus, they will continue to cry out for justice – until the Lord Jesus brings justice. But the day is coming when Jesus will return, and when he returns he will judge the world. He will make all things right – which means that those who refuse to repent will be destroyed.

TEXT: Jeremiah 19:1 – 20:6

TITLE: *VESSELS OF DISHONOR – SHATTERED BEYOND REPAIR*

BIG IDEA:

THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH EXECUTES HIS JUSTICE AND EVOKES TERROR

INTRODUCTION:

Often you hear people making the complaint that God is not fair. In this passage you see the ultimate connection between the Justice of God and the outpouring of His Wrath. Those who have not confessed their sins and put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his propitiatory sacrifice on the cross for forgiveness of sins should be careful about demanding justice from a holy God. When the guillotine of God’s wrath falls, the consequences will be horrifying to see. The terror evoked by these images of impending judgment should strike fear in the hearts of those who stubbornly resist God’s free offer of cleansing from sin.

THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH EXECUTES HIS JUSTICE AND EVOKES TERROR

I. (19:1-9) THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH DELIVERS SHOCKING CONSEQUENCES FROM PERVASIVE IDOLATRY

A. (:1) Purchase of the Potter’s Jar for Object Lesson

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jar, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests.’”

Ryken: The jar was a *baqbuq*, a flask or decanter with a wide body, a narrow neck and a handle for pouring water. Its name came from the gurgling sound water made when it passed through its narrow opening – *baqbuq, baqbuq, baqbuq*.

Constable: These jars, which archaeologists have found in abundance, range in size from four to 10 inches in height, and they have very slim necks.

Object lesson directed to the leaders of the people – both political and religious; instructing them regarding God’s wrath; God uses the simplest illustrations to drive home profound truths with convicting applications

B. (:2-3a) Proclamation of the Word of God

“Then go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate; and proclaim there the words that I shall tell you, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,’”

Constable: Evidently people disposed of their broken pottery and other refuse outside this gate.

Feinberg: He used the plural “*kings*” because the message was not only to the reigning king but to the whole dynasty that was responsible for the apostasy.

C. (:3b-9) Promise of Calamity for Spiritual Adultery and Idolatry

1. (:3b) Sobering Calamity – A Ringing in the Ears

“Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle.”

What will the effect of this terrible calamity be on the surrounding nations?

Parunak: God is going to bring extreme evil upon it, to be defined later. So severe is this judgment that the news of it will strike people’s ears as though by a physical blow. It will shock their senses.

2. (:4-5) Specific Charges

a. Forsaking the One True God

“Because they have forsaken Me”

b. Perverting God’s Holy Habitat – Desecrating the Temple

“and have made this an alien place”

c. False Worship

“and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known,”

d. Murders of Innocent Children

“and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent”

Application: cf. our nation’s guilt for the travesty of abortions

e. Idolatrous Child Sacrifices

“and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind;”

3. (:6-9) Shocking Consequences

a. (:6) Denunciation

“Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, ‘when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.’”

Parunak: The name will be changed. “Tophet” is “fire-pit,” referring to the pagan high place there, where infants were sacrificed. “Valley of Ben Hinnom” goes back to Joshua, and perhaps recalls some ancient owner of the land. But now it will be known

as the Vale of Slaughter. In fact, even the name “Ge-hinnom” has become a metaphor for hell.

Guzik: Topheth probably derives from the Hebrew word for ‘fire-place’ (cf. **Isaiah 30:33**).” (**Cundall**) According to Roni Simon, an Israeli tour guide, in modern Hebrew the word still has the association with fire. If someone comes under gunfire, they might say “I’m under tophet.” **Kidner** also points out that the name Topheth rhymes with *bosheth*, the Hebrew word for “shame.”

b. (:7) Death and Desecration

1) Overturning False Counsel

“And I shall make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place,”

2) Defeating Them in Warfare

“and I shall cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hand of those who seek their life;”

3) Ravaging Their Carcasses

“and I shall give over their carcasses as food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.”

c. (:8) Desolation and Shame

“I shall also make this city a desolation and an object of hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and hiss because of all its disasters.”

Thompson: The picture of passers-by who whistled at the sight of devastation occurs elsewhere in the OT (**1 K. 9:8; Lam. 2:15, 16; Ezek. 27:36; Zeph. 2:15**).

d. (:9) Desperate Cannibalism

“And I shall make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh in the siege and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life will distress them.”

Guzik: The city would be reduced to cannibalism, even as Samaria (the former capital of Israel) under siege from the Assyrians (**2 Kings 6:26-29**) and promised as a curse upon disobedient Israel (**Deuteronomy 28:53-57**). All this would drive the people of Jerusalem to despair.

II. (19:10-15) THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH BRINGS A FINAL END TO STUBBORN REBELLION

A. (:10) Pulverizing of the Potter’s Jar for Object Lesson

“Then you are to break the jar in the sight of the men who accompany you”

B. (:11-13) Proclamation of the Word of God:

I will smash Jerusalem and its people just like I smashed the potter’s pot.

“and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, Just so shall I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place for burial. This is how I shall treat this place and its inhabitants,’ declares the LORD, ‘so as to make this city like Topheth. And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be defiled like the place Topheth, because of all the houses on whose rooftops they burned sacrifices to all the heavenly host and poured out libations to other gods.’”

Parunak: “cannot be made whole again”; lit. “be healed.” AV takes it to mean that the pot, once smashed, cannot be put together again, but that is counter to promises of restoration that we have already seen and that will become even more frequent as the book goes on. Better, “*like a (marred) potter’s vessel that can no longer be fixed*” (because the clay has now hardened). As long as the clay is moist and pliable, a pot that does not please its maker can be adjusted and changed. Once it is hard, it become garbage and can only be smashed.

C. (:14-15) Promise of Calamity for Stubborn Rebellion

“Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD’s house and said to all the people: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to bring on this city and all its towns the entire calamity that I have declared against it, because they have stiffened their necks so as not to heed My words.’”

Adam Clarke: A metaphor taken from unruly and unbroken oxen, who resist the yoke, break and run away with their gears. So this people had broken and destroyed the yoke of the law.

Ryken: The wrath of God is as inevitable and as just as it is fearsome.

III. (20:1-6) THE OUTPOURING OF GOD’S WRATH SHOULD STRIKE TERROR IN THE HEARTS OF THOSE WHO REFUSE TO REPENT

A. (20:1-2) Reaction of Denounced Religious Leaders = Punishing God’s Messenger

“When Pashhur the priest, the son of Immer, who was chief officer in the house of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, Pashhur had Jeremiah the prophet beaten, and put him in the stocks that were at the upper Benjamin Gate, which was by the house of the LORD.”

Feinberg: The “stocks,” where the prophet was confined, were intended not only for

restraint but also for torture. The stocks, which were used for false prophets (cf. **2 Chron 16:10**), held the feet, hands, and neck so that the body was almost doubled up (cf. **29:26**). The Hebrew word for “stocks” means “causing distortion.” Jeremiah was put in the stocks at the Upper Benjamin Gate – the northern gate of the upper temple court. It was one of the most conspicuous places in the city.

B. (:20:3-6) Repetition of God’s Message of Impending Doom = Producing Terror

1. (:3-4) Terror from Prophecy of Slaughter and Captivity

“Then it came about on the next day, when Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, that Jeremiah said to him, ‘Pashhur is not the name the LORD has called you, but rather Magor-missabib. For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am going to make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and while your eyes look on, they will fall by the sword of their enemies. So I shall give over all Judah to the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will carry them away as exiles to Babylon and will slay them with the sword.’”

MacArthur: *Pashhur* – The meaning is either “ease” or “deliverance is round about,” both in contrast to the new name God assigns him in **v. 3**. He was one of several men so named (cf. **21:1; 38:1**). He was one of the original “governors of the sanctuary” (cf. **1 Ch 24:14**).

New name means “*terror all around*” – quite a name to be saddled with

Thompson: Pashhur will not be a temple overseer who metes out punishment to others, but one who will himself suffer the divine judgment when terror surrounds him and the nation.

2. (:5) Terror from Prophecy of Plundering

“I shall also give over all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its costly things; even all the treasures of the kings of Judah I shall give over to the hand of their enemies, and they will plunder them, take them away, and bring them to Babylon.”

Thompson: The extent of the booty that would be taken is indicated by the use of for different words – *wealth, possessions, valuables, and treasures*; and the effect is further heightened by the use of the three verbs “*loot*”, “*take*”, and “*carry off to*”. There could be no mistaking the severity of the calamity.

3. (:6) Terror from Prophecy of Captivity and Death

“And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into captivity; and you will enter Babylon, and there you will die, and there you will be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have falsely prophesied.”

Guzik: Pashhur’s position as priest and chief governor would not help him. He was one

of those who prophesied lies, and he and his friends who heard him would all die in Babylon.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can our culture be so shocked at the barbaric nature of child sacrifice and yet so comfortable with the atrocities of abortion?
- 2) What comfort do you derive from knowing that the enemy cannot prevail against the Sovereign of the Universe?
- 3) How stubborn and stiff-necked are we at times to resist the molding by the master potter?
- 4) How pliable are we in the hands of the potter to make a vessel that is unto His glory?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryken: **Jeremiah 18** was an object lesson in God's sovereignty. **Jeremiah 19** is an even more dramatic lesson in God's wrath. The difference between the two lessons is the difference between wet clay and broken pottery. Clay can be reshaped. As long as clay is still on the potter's wheel, something can be done with it. . .

The point of Jeremiah's message is that there is justice in God's wrath. Every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God. To break even one commandment is to break the whole law of God (**James 2:10**). But these sins especially deserve divine judgment. Is there a sin more heinous than forsaking God? More foolish than worshipping other gods? More vile than murdering one's own children? . . .

Those who slaughtered their children became cannibals. Those who observed pagan rites on their rooftops had their homes destroyed. For God to pour out his wrath against such sins, and such sinners, in such a way, was most just.

Matthew Henry: The same melancholy theme is the subject of this chapter that was of those foregoing--the approaching ruin of Judah and Jerusalem for their sins. This Jeremiah had often foretold here he has particularly full orders to foretel it again.

I. He must set their sins in order before them, as he had often done, especially their idolatry, **Jeremiah 19:4,5**.

II. He must describe the particular judgments which were now coming apace upon them

for these sins, **Jeremiah 19:6-9**.

III. He must do this in the valley of Tophet, with great solemnity, and for some particular reasons, **Jeremiah 19:2,3**.

IV. He must summon a company of the elders together to be witnesses of this, **Jeremiah 19:1**.

V. He must confirm this, and endeavour to affect his hearers with it, by a sign, which was the breaking of an earthen bottle, signifying that they should be dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel, **Jeremiah 19:10-13**.

VI. When he had done this in the valley of Tophet he ratified it in the court of the temple, **Jeremiah 19:14,15**.

Thus were all likely means tried to awaken this stupid senseless people to repentance, that their ruin might be prevented but all in vain.

Louis Prontnicki: Jeremiah bought this clay jar for a particular and deliberate purpose: to smash it! Now this was far from the purpose for which the potter had carefully made it, right? Furthermore, once the jar was shattered, it could be of no more use – ever!

However, in its destruction it served a far nobler purpose than if it had been carefully kept to carry water for many long years. How so? Because the Lord ordained that this jar be used in a prophetic message, to symbolize the judgment of the Lord. So in one sense we could say that the jar was not destroyed, but rather that its service, its use, was divinely and wisely changed to suit God's higher purpose.

In the same way, the capture and conquest of Jerusalem would serve the purposes of God (though they seemed so radically different than what its people thought its purpose should be!). For the destruction of Jerusalem would not only demonstrate the righteous justice and judgment of the Lord; it would also clear the path for One who would enter the city, be greater than the city, and give His life as an atonement for sin, in the city.

Likewise, for us, God's purpose for something, someone, or for our own lives, may be much different – and higher- than what we had in mind. That could include your health, your marriage, your children, your house, car, or retirement savings!

<http://mapleglenchurch.org/2014/03/sermon-march-16-2014-jeremiah-19-shattered-beyond-repair-yet-restored-parables-that-pack-a-punch-sermon-5/>

Peter Wallace: Judgment, Persecution and Lamentation

Have you ever wished that you had never been born? That's okay. Jeremiah did too! So did Job. Still, the end of Jeremiah 20 seems very strange. Lament in verses 7-10, confidence in verses 11-12, praise in verse 13, and then curses on his birth in verses 14-

18.

This only makes sense if you back up and look at the big picture of the book of Jeremiah thus far. Chapters 1-10 laid out the basic message of Jeremiah. Israel and Judah have rejected the LORD (chapters 1-6) Even the temple cannot save them (chapters 7-10). Disaster is coming. Chapters 11-20 have now set forth how judgment is coming upon Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem has broken covenant with the LORD, therefore famine, sword, and plague will destroy God's people.

In chapter 20 we have a couple clues that Jeremiah is bringing this section to a close. First, verse 12 is identical to 11:20. In Hebrew literature, the repetition of a verse is often used to signal the reader that there is a connection between the passages. And since chapter 21 plainly starts a new section, we are encouraged to see chapter 20 bringing a conclusion to the oracles of chapters 11-20.

Second, verses 14-18 go a step further, and connect back to chapter 1! Remember Jeremiah's call: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Now Jeremiah asks, "why did I come out from the womb"? Even as Jerusalem is returned to dust, so also the prophet returns to the womb and begs that he not be born!

1. "I Will Break This People and This City" – the Potter's Flask (19:1-13)

a. The Rubbish Heap in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom (v1-6)

Last time Jeremiah was commanded to watch the potter. Now he is commanded to buy an earthenware flask. He is told to take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. Later, in chapter 26, we will hear that some of the elders defended Jeremiah, so it is possible that Jeremiah had some friends among the elders – and maybe they went with him. (That may explain why no one objects until Jeremiah returns to the temple!) But he is to take them out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, at the entry of the Potsherd Gate.

We heard about the Valley of the Son of Hinnom back in chapter 7. In chapter 7, verses 30-33, Jeremiah was commanded to stand at the gate of the temple and proclaim pretty much the same message. The same themes are found in chapter 7 and chapter 19: changing the name from Topheth, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to the Valley of Slaughter; the reason for judgment – because they burned their children in the fire to idols – and the reminder that "I did not command [this], nor did it come into my mind" – and giving the dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field.

When we looked at chapter 7, we saw that the first part of chapter 7 is probably the temple sermon referred to in Jeremiah 26. The last part of chapter 7 may well be the temple sermon referred to here in chapter 19. After all, at the end of chapter 19, verses 14-15, we are told that Jeremiah repeated the sermon from Topheth. And the end of chapter 7 sounds very much like the same message as chapter 19. The Valley of the Son of Hinnom was the rubbish heap outside Jerusalem. That's why it was called the "potsherd gate." In the book of Jeremiah this is the "ge-ben-hinnom." Later, the word

“son” [ben] will drop out, and this valley will be known as “ge-hinnom” – or in Aramaic, “Gehenna.” In the NT, “gehenna” is a term used for hell by Jesus throughout Matthew’s gospel. And you can see in Jeremiah’s description how ge-hinnom is being transformed into “hell.” In verse 3 the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel, declares that he is bringing “disaster” on Jerusalem – such that the ears of those who hear of it will tingle. 3 You shall say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing such

b. The Horror of Judgment (v7-9)

Jerusalem has become an alien city – a foreign city – to the LORD. And therefore, the LORD hands the city over to destruction. Goliath had said that he would give David’s body for food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. But here it is not Goliath who gives Jerusalem to destruction. It is not the Babylonians! It is the LORD. “I will make void... I will cause them to fall... I will give their dead bodies for food... I will make this city a horror... I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and their daughters...” It is not just that God will “withdraw” and let others do his dirty work. No, the LORD God of Hosts will do this. Yes, he will do this through the instrumentality of “their enemies” (v9), but the enemies are almost an afterthought.

I suspect that Henriette is the only one in our congregation who has any personal experience of what this really looks like. Twenty-one years ago she was running and hiding from the execution gangs hoping and praying that her little children whom she had sent in various directions were still safe. In Jerusalem the famine would reach a point during the siege that mothers would eat their own children. How does one recover from that?

There is a reason why people say, “War is Hell.” I saw the relics of it in Eritrea – the one-legged veterans who had stepped on a landmine – the hollow, hardened gaze of those who had seen (and maybe done) things that no one should ever see (or do). In Revelation 19, it is the exalted Lord Jesus Christ who comes on the white horse and rules the nations with a rod of iron, and the sword that comes from his mouth slays the wicked – “and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.” (19:21) And to give a picture of what he is describing, God tells Jeremiah:

c. God Will Smash Jerusalem to Bits (v10-13)

What do you do with smashed pottery? You throw it away. We’re not talking about a chip or a crack. We’re talking about a flask that has been smashed to bits. God says that he will “break this people and this city... so that it can never be mended.” Never. This is not Jeremiah’s prophecy of the 70 years of exile. There is a sense in which the exile will last for 70 years, and then God’s people will return to the land. But that’s not what Jeremiah is talking about. Jeremiah is talking about never. Jerusalem will never be mended. If Jeremiah had said “70 years” – they might not have liked it, but they could reconcile that with the rest of Scripture. But Jeremiah says never. Men shall bury in Topheth because there will be no place else to bury.

12 Thus will I do to this place, declares the LORD, and to its inhabitants, making this city like Topheth. 13 The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah—all the houses on whose roofs offerings have been offered to all the host of heaven, and drink offerings have been poured out to other gods— shall be defiled like the place of Topheth.” God says that he will turn Jerusalem into Topheth – the houses of Jerusalem – even the house of David – will be defiled like Topheth (the Valley of the Son of Hinnom – Gehenna). In other words, Jerusalem will become Hell.

For how long? When will God restore us? Never. This is it. This is the end of Jerusalem. This is God’s final judgment. There is no going back! Remember who was listening: “some of the elders of the priests.” Jeremiah himself is a priest. It is entirely possible that Jeremiah takes with him those who are sympathetic. The first announcement of coming judgment may have been received by faith. Certainly there is no hint of opposition as Jeremiah delivers the ultimatum – until he moves to a more controversial setting. I will not say “more public” – since the city gates were public settings. But it is one thing for a prophet to make controversial claims among the hoi polloi – among the common people at the city gates, with only a few sympathetic elders as witnesses. It is another thing entirely for a prophet to stand in the court of the LORD’s house...

2. Beaten, but Not Silenced – the True Prophet and the False (19:14-20:6)

a. Jeremiah Repeats the Message in the Court of the LORD’s House (v14-15)

Like I said earlier, it is quite likely that the end of Jeremiah 7 contains the sermon. It is so much like the first part of Jeremiah 19 that at the very least it is a record of another sermon when Jeremiah said the same thing! Jeremiah says that the LORD is bringing disaster upon Jerusalem. There is that word again: “disaster” or “evil.” God is bringing “bad things” upon his own city – the city and the house that is called by his name. Why? “Because they have stiffened their neck, refusing to hear my words.”

Chapter 20, verses 1-2 record Pashhur’s response:

b. Pashhur’s Response (20:1-2)

Pashhur is a priest – the “chief officer in the house of the LORD.” He hears Jeremiah say that God will destroy Jerusalem like a clay pot that can never be repaired. And he says, “Heretic!” He has Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks – publicly humiliated before everyone who comes in and out of the temple. Pashhur is simply doing his job. Jeremiah has said that God will destroy Jerusalem – never to restore it! That’s heresy! Jeremiah cannot be a true prophet – because God said that Jerusalem would endure forever! Brothers and sisters, when people say that God only does good – and never brings disaster – they are false prophets on the order of Pashhur. They are destroying God’s people by lying about God and saying “peace, peace,” when there is no peace. Listen to what God says to Pashhur:

c. The LORD’s Reply to Pashhur: “To Babylon You Shall Go” (20:3-6)

Pashhur, the chief officer in the house of the LORD, has forgotten the “if.” God promised that he would bless Jerusalem if Jerusalem followed the LORD. God

promised that he would bless David if his sons followed the LORD. Jerusalem has turned away from the LORD. Therefore the king of Babylon will strike down Jerusalem and take the people and their wealth to Babylon. Pashhur's friends will be struck down by the sword, while Pashhur himself will be taken into captivity. And above all, Pashhur's name is changed to "Terror on Every Side" – or "Surrounded by Trembling." To some extent, Pashhur faces a fate worse than death. The temple that Pashhur served would be destroyed. He will be alive – but alive only to go into captivity – and to die there – and be buried far from Jerusalem!

In chapter 19 Jeremiah was clear: God is the one who will do this. In chapter 20 Jeremiah explains that the king of Babylon will be the instrument. But verses 7-18 of chapter 20 seem strange at this point. Perhaps we need to hear verses 7-12 as Jeremiah's prayer while he was in the stocks. Verse 13 as his relief at being released. And verses 14-18 as his concluding lament. Because as we have seen, verses 7-18 form not only the conclusion to this story, but also the conclusion to this segment (chapters 11-20) and indeed the conclusion to Part One of the prophecy of Jeremiah. Jeremiah has announced that Jerusalem is going to Hell. Or more precisely, that Jerusalem will become Hell. God's final judgment is coming upon Jerusalem. And Jeremiah cannot bear it anymore!

3. The Lamentation of Jeremiah (20:7-18)

Paul's language in Romans 8 summarizes verses 7-13 very well:

a. "Perplexed, but Not in Despair; Persecuted, but Not Abandoned" (v7-13)

(Of course, verses 14-18 are another story!) But let's start with the easy part!

i) God Prevails Over Me (v7)

7 O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; That's the easy part?! God has given us a beautiful gift in the book of Jeremiah. Not only do we get to hear the voice of the LORD proclaiming judgment – turning Jerusalem into Hell.

9 But we also get to hear the voice of the prophet – we get to hear the cost of proclaiming the Word of the LORD. The verb translated "you have deceived me" could mean something stronger: "you have abused me" – or even "you have seduced me." It's not a nice word. It's used to speak of how a man might seduce a virgin (Ex 22) how Delilah enticed Samson (Judges 16), or how the evil spirit from God deceived Ahab (1 Kings 22). And in Ezekiel 14:9 God says "if the prophet be deceived and speak a word, I, the LORD, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand against him, and destroy him from the midst of my people Israel."

What does Jeremiah mean? God had been very clear from the start: "they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you." (1:19) And yet Jeremiah has been beaten by the temple guards, and is now sitting in the stocks. O LORD, you said that you would be with me! You said that they would not prevail! What am I doing here? 7 O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.

The key to this whole passage is the word taken from Jeremiah 1:19 “They shall not prevail against you.” The word “prevail” is found in chapter 20, verses, 7, 9, 10, and 11. In verse 7, God has prevailed over Jeremiah. In verse 9, the last word in the verse is “I cannot prevail.” In v10, the enemies say, “Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can prevail over him.” In v11, Jeremiah replies, “they will not prevail over me.” In verse 7, Jeremiah realizes that God’s promise of protection meant something different than he expected. 10 God said that my enemies would not prevail against me. Obviously getting beaten and put in stocks feels like my enemies are prevailing! You said they would not prevail. But I have no choice in the matter:

ii). I Cannot Prevail (v8-9)

8 For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, “Violence and destruction!” For the word of the LORD has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. 9 If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot PREVAIL. When I speak, I get beaten. When I am silent, a fire burns in my heart. I can’t win. Verse 10 shows us how closely connected this lament is to the Pashhur episode:

iii). My Persecutors Seek to Prevail Over Me (v10)

10 For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! [remember the new name that God gave Pashhur! – Terror on every side!] “Denounce him! Let us denounce him!” say all my close friends, watching for my fall. “Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him [we can prevail against him] and take our revenge on him.” And this is precisely what has happened. Jeremiah blew it! He said that Jerusalem would be destroyed like a clay pot – never to be mended. Jeremiah has denied the covenant – he has rejected the word of Moses – the promises to David – God’s covenant with Aaron and Zadok.

11 Except for one thing. Jeremiah knows that he has only said what the LORD commanded him to say! “Proclaim there the words that I tell you... Hear the word of the LORD... Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel... declares the LORD... Thus says the LORD of hosts... Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel. Six times in the fifteen verses of chapter 19, the LORD said! And so Jeremiah concludes:

iv). They Will Not Prevail Because I Trust the LORD of Hosts (v11-13)

Jeremiah is confident that God will make things right. He knows that vengeance belongs to God. He has committed his cause to the LORD. He remembers what God said – back in chapter 1 – “I am with you, declares the LORD, to deliver you.” So Jeremiah knows (even in the stocks) that his persecutors will stumble. They will not prevail.

This is why I am so nonchalant about current affairs. Is serious persecution coming to Christians in America? Will South Bend become hostile to the gospel? Maybe. But they will not succeed! No weapon formed against you can stand. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. Will we suffer? Of course! We are servants of

Jesus – and a servant is not greater than his master! Those who afflict you will be destroyed by the sword that comes out of Jesus’ mouth when he comes to judge the world at the last day! 13 Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers. This would be Jeremiah’s song of joy as he is delivered from the stocks. It is our song of joy as we remember that Jesus will deliver us, as Paul says in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Or again in Romans 8:31, “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” And if Jesus had already come, that’s where Jeremiah 20 would end. But Jesus hasn’t come yet – and so Jeremiah 20 must go one step further: After all, remember what Jeremiah has said in chapter 19! Jerusalem will be destroyed like a clay pot – never to be restored! Never? What does that mean? Jeremiah may have confidence that the LORD has (and will) deliver him, but his own message still grieves him to the core of his being!

b. Would that My Mother Had Been My Grave! (v14-18)

The Law of Moses forbids you to curse your father or your mother. So Jeremiah does not! Instead he curses the day when his mother bore him! And he curses the man who brought the happy news to his father!

i). Cursed Be the Day (v14)

14 Cursed be the day on which I was born! The day when my mother bore me, let it not be blessed! This is a stunning transition from praise to curse. Back in chapter 15, verse 10, Jeremiah had said, “Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land!” But there, the LORD answered immediately. Here Jeremiah launches into an extended malediction on the day of his birth and the man who brought his father the news. This is very similar to Job 3, where Job curses the day of his birth. Why does Jeremiah do this?

ii). Cursed Be the Man (v15-18)

Jeremiah is a messenger. He has been appointed by God to be a messenger of death. Now he wishes that the messenger who brought tidings of life to his father, “a son is born to you” would become “like the cities that the LORD overthrew without pity.” If only the messenger had refused to do his job – and rather than bring the message of joy, instead he should have killed the infant Jeremiah while he was still in the womb. Jeremiah was the LORD’s appointed prophet from the womb. He was the one whom God had appointed to destroy Jerusalem by his word. If Jeremiah had died in the womb, then maybe Jerusalem would not have been destroyed!

How do you hold together the praise and the confidence of verse 13 with the curses and the anguish of verses 14-18? By recognizing that Jeremiah is not Jesus. Jeremiah has been called to destroy Jerusalem. “I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (1:10)

14 Jeremiah has been called to smash Jerusalem to bits – never to be restored. There will be a partial restoration in 70 years. But the earthly Jerusalem – the city and the temple where God placed his name – will never be restored. Paul will say that the “Jerusalem that now is” is Hagar – Mt. Sinai in Arabia – and she is in captivity with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free – and she is our mother! Paul sees the heavenly Jerusalem – and so has greater confidence and joy!

But Jeremiah isn't there yet. And, if we are honest, sometimes neither are we! If Jeremiah could say – as a part of inspired scripture – that he wished that he had never born, so that he would not have to do what God called him to do! then it is okay for the people of God to struggle, to lament and mourn. It's even okay to wish that God had never called you to do what he has called you to do! After all, we have been called to bring a similar message of judgment to those around us.

Let me give you excerpts from the early sermons in the book of Acts: “Save yourself from this crooked generation” (2:40) “every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed” (3:23) “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit” (7:51) “Since you thrust aside [the word of God] and judge yourself unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles” (13:46) “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world” (17:30-31)

The message of the gospel includes the warning that Judgment Day is coming. The city of man – like the earthly Jerusalem – will be destroyed. All that is in rebellion against God will be smashed like a clay pot – never to be repaired! And we should weep – with Jeremiah (and with Paul) – that we have such a fearsome message. But like Jeremiah – and like Paul – woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! As C. S. Lewis said, everyone you meet is headed to one of two final destinations: heaven or hell. And your interaction with them will help them towards one or the other! Lord, have mercy!

TEXT: Jeremiah 20:7-18

TITLE: *THE BURDEN OF THE CALL TO MINISTRY*

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S MESSENGERS WRESTLE WITH THE SUFFERING AND ABUSE ASSOCIATED WITH FAITHFULLY PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

INTRODUCTION:

You would think that faithfulness to God in a difficult ministry setting would fortify God's servant with special confidence and a sense of God's favor and presence. But such is not always the case. Sometimes the messenger of God can succumb to deeply conflicting emotions that cause him to question the value of his calling. Is it really worth it to continue serving God when all I see around me are stubborn, unrepentant hearts and fierce opposition and treachery from even my closest friends? Did God sucker me into this Christian calling and sell me a bill of goods?

Wiersbe: This is the last of Jeremiah's recorded laments; it's a human blending of grief and joy, prayer and despair, praise and perplexity. When you call to mind the sensitive nature of this man, you aren't surprised that he's on the mountaintop one minute and in the deepest valley the next. Jeremiah, however, lived above his moods and did the will of God regardless of how he felt. In this honest expression of his deepest emotions, the prophet dealt with three important concerns: God's call (vv 7-9), his daily peril (vv. 10-13), and his inner despair (vv. 14-15).

GOD'S MESSENGERS WRESTLE WITH THE SUFFERING AND ABUSE ASSOCIATED WITH FAITHFULLY PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

I. (:7-10) GOD'S MESSENGERS SUFFER GREATLY FOR THEIR FAITHFULNESS TO GOD'S WORD

A. (:7-8) Faithfulness to God's Word Brings Abuse and Perplexity

"O LORD, Thou hast deceived me and I was deceived; Thou hast overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of the LORD has resulted in reproach and derision all day long."

Parunak: At first, he is "persuaded" (not "deceived") by the Lord. "You persuaded me to be a prophet, and your arguments prevailed against me." Suggests that he was willing at the time, though perhaps not as perceptive as he should have been about the problems he would face. But there is no complaint against the Lord here.

Alternative: word has connotation of being deceived and seduced – some combination of these ideas here.

Mackay: Jeremiah expressed strong reservations about his suitability and capacity (1:6), but the Lord persuaded him, that is, “overcame his initial reluctance”. Looking back, Jeremiah is saying that if he had known what he now knew about what being the Lord’s prophet entailed, he would have protested more strongly, he might even have said “No”. It was one thing to have been warned – which he was; it was another to grasp the full extent of the experiences those warnings conveyed.

B. (:9-10) Faithfulness to God’s Word Requires Expression – Despite the Abuse

“But if I say, ‘I will not remember Him Or speak anymore in His name,’ Then in my heart it becomes like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; And I am weary of holding it in, And I cannot endure it. For I have heard the whispering of many, ‘Terror on every side! Denounce him; yes, let us denounce him!’ All my trusted friends, watching for my fall, say: ‘Perhaps he will be deceived, so that we may prevail against him And take our revenge on him.’

Longman: It is harder for him not to speak than to speak, a classic case of being “between a rock and a hard place.” [1 Cor. 9:16]

Feinberg: For Jeremiah the word of God was a reality, not the product of his thinking. It demanded expression in spite of opposition and derision. So great was this compelling force of the revelation that he never doubted its reality.

Ryken: This is another familiar text from Jeremiah that is usually taken out of context. It is often used as an inspirational verse for preachers. And so it is. The Word of God is like an unquenchable, uncontainable fire in the bones of the gospel minister. . .

When Jeremiah spoke about the fire in his bones, however, he was not speaking about the pleasures of ministry. He was not testifying to the delights of preaching in the Holy Spirit. He was not saying that his heart was aflame with the gospel. Rather, his heart burned with judgment. The fiery word in his bones was law rather than grace. He was not eager to preach but reluctant, for he knew that judgment would pour out as soon as he opened his mouth. Jeremiah would have given anything to have a mute ministry, but the Word of God would not allow him to remain silent. The fire in his bones inevitably blazed forth from his lips.

Constable: The prophet knew that the people were complaining that all he ever talked about was coming terror. He had become a "*Magomassibib*" (terror on every side) of sorts himself (cf. **Jeremiah 20:3**), and the people may well have applied this nickname to him. They felt someone should denounce him for speaking so pessimistically and harshly about their nation. Even his trusted friends had turned against him and were hoping that he would make some mistake so they could discredit him for his words. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered similar opposition (cf. **Mark 3:2; Mark 14:58; Luke 6:7; Luke 14:1; Luke 20:20**).

II. (:11-13) GOD'S MESSENGERS CAN COUNT ON ULTIMATE DELIVERANCE AND VINDICATION

A. (:11) Shout Victory Over Disgraced Persecutors

*“But the LORD is with me like a dread champion;
Therefore my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.
They will be utterly ashamed, because they have failed, with an everlasting
disgrace that will not be forgotten.”*

Parunak: The Lord is compared with “*a terrible warrior.*” He is often called a “warrior,” but this is the only time he is described as “terrible,” an adjective that otherwise is reserved for the wicked and the foreign nations. The point is that he can pay back in kind whatever Jer’s enemies dish out to him.

Mackay: When the Lord acts to vindicate the word he has sent through Jeremiah, then he will remember what the prophet’s persecutors had done and he will permanently show them up for what they are. They will experience “disgrace of perpetuity” which would last throughout their lives and beyond.

Christine Cuendet: Parallels exist between **Deuteronomy 10** and **verses 11-13 of Jeremiah 20**. Jeremiah understood that God promised good to Israel if they would obey him, as in **Deuteronomy 10:12**, where they are admonished to fear the Lord, walk in obedience to him, love him, serve him with all their heart and soul, and observe his commands and decrees.

B. (:12) See Vengeance on Persecutors

*“Yet, O LORD of hosts, Thou who dost test the righteous, who seest the mind
and the heart; Let me see Thy vengeance on them; For to Thee I have set forth
my cause.”*

C. (:13) Sing Praise for Deliverance

*“Sing to the LORD, praise the LORD! For He has delivered the soul of the
needy one from the hand of evildoers.”*

Adam Clarke: He was so completely delivered from all fear, that although he remained in the same circumstances, yet he exults in the Divine protection, and does not fear the face of any adversary.

III. (:14-18) GOD'S MESSENGERS STRUGGLE EMOTIONALLY WITH THE BURDEN OF THEIR CALLING

*“Cursed be the day when I was born; Let the day not be blessed when my
mother bore me! Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father, saying,
'A baby boy has been born to you!' And made him very happy. But let that man
be like the cities which the LORD overthrew without relenting, and let him hear
an outcry in the morning and a shout of alarm at noon; because he did not kill
me before birth, so that my mother would have been my grave, and her womb*

ever pregnant. Why did I ever come forth from the womb to look on trouble and sorrow, so that my days have been spent in shame?"

Constable: Jeremiah bewailed the fact that he ever came out of his mother's womb, since his life had been so full of trouble, sorrow, and shame. **Jeremiah 20:17-18** are another indication that human life exists in a mother's womb before birth. Jeremiah existed as a person in his mother's womb.

Wiersbe: "Why came I forth out of the womb?" is an easy question to answer: because God had a special purpose for your life and designed you to fulfill it (Jer. 1:4-5; Ps. 139:13-16). God makes not mistakes when He calls His servants, and we should take care not to question His wisdom. All of us have had times of discouragement when we've felt like quitting, but that's when we must look beyond our feelings and circumstances and see the greatness and wisdom of God. As **V. Raymond Edman**, former president of Wheaton College (Ill.), often said to the students, "It's always too soon to quit."

Kidner: What these curses convey, therefore, is a state of mind, not a prosaic plea. The heightened language is not there to be analysed: it is there to bowl us over. Together with other tortured cries from him and his fellow sufferers, these raw wounds in Scripture remain lest we forget the sharpness of the age-long struggle, or the frailty of the finest overcomers.

Mackay: The anguished cries of Jeremiah (and of Job before him) uttered in the face of the perplexities of life are not to be condemned as unworthy. Tension, stress and frustration are part of the inevitable consequences of living in this warped and sinful world. Situations have to be faced that pose problems of severe agony, intensified in the experience of the righteous sufferer by the fact that the face of God is often hidden at such times.

Ryken: We must recognize the confusing, almost schizophrenic nature of the Christian life. We are at one and the same time saints and sinners. Although our sins are forgiven, we continue to sin. One minute we praise, and the next we curse; one moment we rejoice in Go's plan, and the very next we resist his will. . .

Jeremiah knew the trouble of persecution, the sorrow of watching his people reject God's Word, and the shame of public humiliation. All this suffering placed a giant question mark over his existence. Though he was strong in his faith, there were times when he had more questions than answers. On this occasion he questioned his creation, his salvation, and his vocation. . .

Jeremiah raced his troubles back to the womb. But he did not go back far enough! God could trace his promises back before the womb. He'd had a purpose for Jeremiah's life since before the beginning of time. The prophet needed to be reminded that from all eternity, the Lord had set him apart for salvation and ministry.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Are you shocked and dismayed when people don't have a positive response to your presentation of the truth of God?
- 2) How have you suffered in fellowship with Jesus Christ in fulfilling your calling to proclaim the gospel message? What has your response been to that suffering.
- 3) Are we too critical and judgmental of those who are wrestling with deep emotions of pain and abandonment and perplexity?
- 4) What can you do to cultivate the mindset that the "*Lord is with you like a dread champion*"?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longman: As we have just heard (**20:1-6**), Jeremiah's message was not met with repentance but resistance. He is not proclaimed as a messenger of God come to save the nation from destruction, but he is met with violence because the religious and political authorities believed he was seditious and a false prophet. This complaint records the prophet's reaction to his circumstances. Using the lament form familiar at least in general structure and tone to what we find often in the psalms of disorientation, Jeremiah records his anger toward God and those who persecute him. However, also like the lament psalms found in the Psalter, Jeremiah registers his confidence in God as his protector. Typically, however, in laments that move from sorrow to joy, the latter is the mood with which the composition ends. Here, as is typical with people who are in mental and physical torment, it moves back and forth and ends as it begins – with sadness concerning the circumstances. Jeremiah's other laments may be seen in **11:18-12:6; 15:10-11, 15-21; 17:14-18; 18:19-23**.

Luther Seminary: Some interpreters think that this lament is so filled with anguish because the prophet deeply identifies with his people in their anticipated destruction. But the text does not speak so about the people. Indeed, he fervently prays that God's judgment will be quickly forthcoming on the whole lot of them for their opposition and persecution (explicit in **20:1-6** and elsewhere). Jeremiah's anguish is better related to the nature of his calling and his sense of being torn between God and people.

Especially troubling to readers is Jeremiah's claim that God has seduced him (**20:7**). Some think that his anguish is related to the absence of a positive response of the people to his preaching. Yet, given his uncompromising word about the stubbornness of the people and the certain judgment, it seems unlikely that he expected such a positive response. More basically, his lament relates to his sense of entrapment between an

overpowering word from an insistent God and a stubborn and derisive people. He feels squeezed between them and complains about the sheer difficulty in being placed by God in what turned out to be an impossible position. Jeremiah never suggests that the word he was called to preach was a false word. His sharp speaking to God is the type of honest and faithful interaction that God encourages in relationships (compare Abraham; Moses).

Jeremiah's lament does not stay focused on God, but moves quickly to the response his word has engendered and the oppressive position in which he finds himself. His real complaints are about his persecutors and he expresses confidence that God will deliver him from this situation. His last words (**20:14-18**), addressed to himself and not to God, express a strong wish that he had not been placed in this position. This language is not self-hatred or self-loathing, but related to his calling. Given what has happened, he wishes that he had not become a prophet and, given that he was chosen from the womb (**1:5**), that he had not been born at all. He would then have been spared the life of great hardship that he has had in his prophetic role.

Drinkard, Craigie, and Kelley suggest the follow chiastic structure for this passage:

A Complaint against Yahweh (vv. 7-9)

B Complaint against “enemies” (v. 10)

C Assurance: Yahweh is with me (v. 11a)

B’ Fall of the “enemies” (v. 11b-d)

C’ Assurance: Yahweh sees the heart (v.12a)

B’’ Vengeance on “enemies” (v. 12b)

A’ Praise of Yahweh for deliverance (v. 13)

Christine Cuendet: An Exegetical Paper on 20:7-18

Jeremiah’s lament is a painful complaint to God from a heart that is on fire for God’s holiness. Jeremiah pours forth his sorrow to God, grieving even the day he was born, for he knows the truth of the prophetic words he is speaking, yet there is not a single responsive soul in Judah that will heed his warning. Even his close friends plot revenge against him, and so he laments of life, both loving and hating the position he now finds himself in. Still, God’s promises are true and Jeremiah speaks and acts with no shadow of a doubt that God can and will fulfill his plans from the grandest scale of punishment for Judah’s rebellion to the most minute detail of Jeremiah’s own life. God has promised and he will bring it to fulfillment.

https://www.academia.edu/5776032/Jeremiahs_Complaint_An_Exegetical_Paper_on_Jeremiah_20_7-18

Richard Niell Donovan:

Jeremiah is complaining that he has been misled—sold a bill of goods. Yahweh’s recruiting ploy was successful. Jeremiah is feeling as if he has been played for a sucker. Life has hardly been a bed of roses -- but then a bed of roses isn’t exactly what Yahweh promised. If we look closely at the promises that Yahweh made during Jeremiah’s call in **1:8, 10, 19**, Yahweh has fulfilled them all. His position is entirely defensible. No court would convict him. . .

“For I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side. Denounce, and we will denounce him” (v. 10a). After Pashhur released Jeremiah from the stocks, Jeremiah told Pashhur, “Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword. Moreover I will give all the riches of this city, and all its gains, and all the precious things of it, yes, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies; and they shall make them a prey, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. You, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity; and you shall come to Babylon, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you, and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely” (**20:4-6**).

Now it appears that the people have decided to taunt Jeremiah by calling him by the indictment that he had used for Pashhur—“a terror to yourself, and to all your friends.” When people see Jeremiah, they say, “Watch out! Here comes old Terror on every side.” It is difficult to be the butt of such mocking—and even more difficult to counter it. Jeremiah is angry with Yahweh, because Jeremiah has said the words that Yahweh put in his mouth, but those words have come back to haunt him.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/biblical-commentary/jeremiah-207-13/>

Ryken: God gives us permission to take our sufferings directly to him. This is what godly people have done throughout history. It is what Job did on the ash heap when he lamented the loss of his family (**Job 3**). It is what Elijah did under the broom tree when he wanted the Lord to take his life (**1 Kings 19:4**). It is what David did in the cave when he fled from Saul (**Psalms 57**). It is what Jonah did in the belly of the great fish, when he ran away from God (Jonah 2). It is even what Jesus Christ did on the cross when he was crucified to atone for his people’s sins: “My God, my God, Why have you forsake me?” (**Matthew 27:46**)

Take your sufferings to that secret place where you meet God in prayer. That is where you must take them. Where else can you unburden your heart so freely? Who else will comfort you so tenderly? There is no need to hide your troubles. Take them to the Lord in prayer, the way Jeremiah did.

TEXT: Jeremiah 21:1-14

TITLE: *WHEN GOD BECOMES YOUR ENEMY*

BIG IDEA:

DON'T SEEK GOD'S DELIVERANCE IF YOU ARE NOT PRACTICING SOCIAL JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:

When we seek the Lord's intervention and deliverance, apart from contrition and repentance, we should not be surprised to find that God has become our enemy. This new section in the book of Jeremiah flashes forward to the days of King Zedekiah and the siege under King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The choice offered here to the inhabitants of Jerusalem is not very attractive: they can either continue to resist the enemy and be slaughtered or surrender and be subjected to captivity and oppression. But the problem is their own lack of social justice and their pursuit of wickedness despite persistent warnings from God's prophets.

DON'T SEEK GOD'S DELIVERANCE IF YOU ARE NOT PRACTICING SOCIAL JUSTICE

I. (:1-2) PLEA FOR DELIVERANCE

A. (:1) Setting the Scene

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, saying,"

Parunak: Zedekiah is already king, thus 597-586. Furthermore, Neb. Is currently fighting against the city (v. 2), and is said to have besieged it (v. 4), so we are catapulted to the final attack against Jerusalem, which began in 588 and ended 18 months later in 586. . . They do not repent, or even ask for intercession, but simply want to know what is going to happen. But Jer. Has already told them, over and over again, what is going to happen. They refuse to believe the simple message of judgment that he has brought.

Adam Clarke: There can be little doubt that this Pashhur was a different person from him who was called the son of Immur in the preceding chapter.

B. (:2) Seeking Divine Deliverance

"Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is warring against us; perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonderful acts, that the enemy may withdraw from us."

Constable: Zedekiah may have been hoping for a miraculous deliverance such as Jehoshaphat experienced from the Moabites, Ammonites, and Meunites (**2 Chronicles**

20). Hezekiah had also experienced supernatural deliverance when Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 19; Isaiah 37).

Andrew Webb: But it doesn't make sense! What kind of craziness would lead the king and the people of Jerusalem to believe that they could break covenant with God, worship false idols, corrupt his worship, ignore his ethical commands, mercilessly oppress the poor and enslaved, and then be miraculously delivered from the judgment God had told them was coming again and again and again.?

II. (:3-10) PROCLAMATION OF DEFEAT AND DEATH AND DESTRUCTION

A. (:3-6) Defeat and Death Personally Administered by the Hand of God

“Then Jeremiah said to them, ‘You shall say to Zedekiah as follows:’”

Surprising and Shocking response from the Lord to a plea for help and deliverance from His chosen nation that is under siege from the wicked nation of Babylon –

What does God promise He will do for them:

1. (:4a) Render Your Weapons Ineffective

“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am about to turn back the weapons of war which are in your hands, with which you are warring against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who are besieging you outside the wall;’”

2. (:4b) Allow the Enemy to Gain Control of Jerusalem

“and I shall gather them into the center of this city.”

3. (:5) Personally Wage Intense War Against You

“And I Myself shall war against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm, even in anger and wrath and great indignation.”

Parunak: *“With an outstretched hand and with a strong arm”* is a quotation from earlier times: **Duet. 4:34; 5:15; 26:8**. 800 years before, this was how God delivered them from Egypt. But here the phrases are reversed, to emphasize that God's strength now works in the reverse direction. The same strength that once saved the nation from one pagan lord now beats it into submission to another master.

Gill's Exposition: *even in anger, and in fury, and in great wrath*; because of their sins and iniquities. This heap of words is used to show the greatness of his indignation: this was not the chastisement of a father, but the rebuke of an enemy; not a correction in love, but in hot displeasure; a punishment inflicted in vindictive wrath by a righteous Judge, appearing in a warlike manner.

<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/21-5.htm>

4. (:6) Kill Every Man and Beast in the City with a Divine Plague

“I shall also strike down the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they will die of a great pestilence.”

But that is not the end of it ... God goes on and itemizes more devastation:

B. (:7) Defeat and Death Administered by the Sword of Nebuchadnezzar

1. No Escape

“Then afterwards’ declares the LORD, ‘I shall give over Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even those who survive in this city from the pestilence, the sword, and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their foes, and into the hand of those who seek their lives;”

Thompson: The building up of nouns in blocks of three which is characteristic of this passage (vv. 6, 7) adds vividness and emphasis to the grim picture.

2. No Victory

“and he will strike them down with the edge of the sword.”

3. No Mercy

“He will not spare them nor have pity nor compassion.”

C. (:8-10) Defeat and Destruction Destined for Jerusalem

1. (:8-9) Choice Between Way of Life and Way of Death

a. Offer of the Choice

“You shall also say to this people, ‘Thus says the LORD, Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.’”

b. Option #1 = Way of Death

“He who dwells in this city will die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence;”

c. Option #2 = Way of Life

“but he who goes out and falls away to the Chaldeans who are besieging you will live, and he will have his own life as booty.”

MacArthur: Since a persistent lack of repentance had led to the conquest, Jeremiah urged the Jews to submit and surrender to the besieger so as to be treated as captives of war and live rather than be killed.

2. (:10) The Die is Cast

a. Primary Enemy = God

“For I have set My face against this city for harm and not for good,’ declares the LORD.”

b. Instrumental Enemy = Babylon

“It will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire.”

I. (:11-14) PRINCIPLE OF ACCOUNTABILITY: ADMINISTER SOCIAL JUSTICE OR EXPERIENCE GOD’S PUNISHMENT

(:11-12a)

“Then say to the household of the king of Judah, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O house of David, thus says the LORD:’”

A. (:12b) The Administration of Justice is the Only Pathway to Escaping God’s Wrath

“Administer justice every morning; and deliver the person who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor, that My wrath may not go forth like fire And burn with none to extinguish it, because of the evil of their deeds.”

The administration of social justice was the responsibility of the king and his royal delegates. They had not acted with integrity in this regard.

Constable: Jeremiah was to tell the king of Judah and his administrators to be careful to dispense justice every day, particularly with the poor and powerless. If they did not, the Lord’s wrath would burn against them as an inextinguishable fire (cf. **Jeremiah 4:4; Jeremiah 17:4; Jeremiah 17:27; Jeremiah 21:12; Jeremiah 21:14; Jeremiah 43:12; Jeremiah 49:27**). Normally court convened in the morning to avoid the heat of the day (cf. **2 Samuel 4:5**).

B. (:13) The Arrogance of Invincibility Cannot Stand Against God

“Behold, I am against you, O valley dweller, O rocky plain,’ declares the LORD, ‘You men who say, Who will come down against us? Or who will enter into our habitations?’”

Wiersbe: The people of Jerusalem were certain that their city was impregnable and that there was no need to be afraid. Surrounded on three sides by valleys – Hinom on the south and west, and Kidron on the east – the city had to defend itself only on the north. Jerusalem’s inhabitants saw themselves enthroned on the rocky plateau, but God would

soon dethrone them and cause them to lose their crown.

C. (:14) The Appropriateness of the Punishment Matches the Conduct

“But I shall punish you according to the results of your deeds,” declares the LORD, ‘And I shall kindle a fire in its forest That it may devour all its environs.’”

Wiersbe: Since the Babylonian army did set fire to the city, God did “*kindle a fire in the forest*” (**Jer. 21:14**). The phrase “*the forest*” probably refers to the structures in the city, especially to the king’s palace, the house of the forest of Lebanon (**1 Kings 7:2; 10:17, 21**). The cedars of Lebanon were used to construct various buildings in the city.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What will happen to people who persist in resisting God’s warnings?
- 2) Why is it not possible to be a fence sitter when confronted with the requirements of God?
- 3) At what point does God cease to offer deliverance and resolve to execute judgment in anger and wrath?
- 4) What are some things or mindsets that contribute to a feeling of invincibility and lack of accountability before God in today’s culture?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ellicott: There is obviously a great gap at this point in the collection of the prophet’s utterances, and we enter on a new body or group of prophecies which extends to the close of **Jeremiah 33**. Thus far we have had his ministry under Jehoiakim, the roll which was read before that king, and formed the first part of his work. Now we pass to the later stage, which forms what has been called the roll of Zedekiah. The judgment predicted in the previous roll had come nearer. The armies of Nebuchadnezzar were gathering round the city. The prophet was now honoured and consulted, and the king sent his chief minister, Pashur (not the priest who had been the prophet’s persecutor, as in the preceding chapter, but the head of the family or course of Melchiah), and Zephaniah, the “*second priest*,” or deputy of **Jeremiah 52:24**, to ask his intercession. We learn from their later history that they were in their hearts inclined to the policy of resistance, and ready to accuse Jeremiah of being a traitor (**Jeremiah 38:1-4**).

<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/jeremiah/21-1.htm>

Keil and Delitzsch: The Lord's reply through Jeremiah consists of three parts:

- a. The answer to the king's hope that the Lord will save Jerusalem from the Chaldeans (**Jeremiah 21:4-7**);
- b. The counsel given to the people and the royal family as to how they may avert ruin (**Jeremiah 21:8-12**);
- c. The prediction that Jerusalem will be punished for her sins (**Jeremiah 21:13 and Jeremiah 21:14**).

David Durant: Zedekiah, A King With a Divided Heart

Competition in sports can be a good thing. You need to give everything you have got if you want to win. You can't give just a half-hearted effort. The same is true when it comes to serving God. Chaps. 1-20 appear to have been written earlier in the ministry of Jeremiah. This chapter 21 begins a new section covering a later period of time.

3 times Nebuchadnezzar experienced victory over Jerusalem and its inhabitants and took captives. Now we fast forward to the reign of King Zedekiah. He had been made king by Nebuchadnezzar. But after he rebelled, now the Babylonian army arrives for the third and final time to lay siege against the city. Babylon is the capital city of Chaldea so the Babylonians were also known as Chaldeans.

Zedekiah sends senior officials to ask Jeremiah to inquire of the Lord on behalf of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. He was undoubtedly thinking of God's deliverance from the siege under King Sennacherib of the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah. He was seeking a repeat of this type of deliverance. Why didn't God come thru in the same way this time? God made it perfectly clear that He rejected this plea for help.

2 Chron. 29:2; 31:20 – Hezekiah did what was right – that was the difference. He was not half-hearted in his devotion to God. He served God with all of his heart until much later in his life. **2 Kings 20:3**; Zedekiah only turned to God as a last ditch attempt to avoid disaster at the hands of the Babylonians. At best he had a divided heart.

Jesus said you cannot serve both God and man or wealth. You can only serve God acceptedly with a whole heart. The new covenant is a covenant that transforms the heart.

<https://www.mtairypca.org/sermons/sermon/2018-08-26/zedekiah-a-king-with-a-divided-heart>

Andrew Webb: The Way of Life and the Way of Death

Jeremiah is not a book that is rigidly chronologized, in other words it records the events in Jeremiah's life and ministry, but not always in the order in which they occurred. For instance, the events we just read about in Jeremiah 20 took place during the reign of King Jehoiakim somewhere between 608 & 598 BC, but the events we just read about in this chapter take place around 20 years later, in 588 BC. Page 2 of 5 Now why would God do that? Why would he suddenly bring us forward 20 years in time? Well you'll recall that in the previous chapter Jeremiah, had been struggling in his ministry, his prophecies of impending "Violence and Plunder" on the people of Judah because of their stubborn refusal to repent were being mocked by the people because they didn't immediately happen, meanwhile other prophets were prophesying smooth things and deliverance and continued stability and national victory, and Jeremiah himself is

beginning to wonder if he's been duped.

Well, fast forward 20 years and we see that Jeremiah's prophecies have been vindicated. The prophet who couldn't hold back the word of God that was burning in his bones was preaching the truth. The smooth prophets were lying. Babylon, the nation to the North, that God spoke to Jeremiah about has come down upon Judah like a destroying swarm of locusts, all the fortified cities have been taken and now only Jerusalem is left, and that is besieged by the army of Nebuchadnezzar.

What is God showing us? His showing us that although the word His servants bring may not be fulfilled immediately, have patience, he is not slack regarding my promises. If He promises to honor and bless the man who keeps His word and acts in faith, it may not happen immediately, but it will. And similarly, if He promises to curse the man who rebels against Him, that too will happen. You can count on it. And rather than taking us through the years of waiting in the narrative, God brought us straight to the fulfillment.

Daryl Hilbert: JUDAH SEEKS JEREMIAH'S PRAYERS

I. COMMENCEMENT OF KING ZEDEKIAH (Jer 21:1-2)

A. King Zedekiah Sends Messengers

1. King Zedekiah

- a. This is the first time Zedekiah is mentioned since the first chapter (Jer 1:3).
- b. He is mentioned in the book of Jeremiah more than any other king during Jeremiah's ministry (i.e. 48 times - Jer. 1:3 Jer. 21:1, 3, 7 Jer. 24:8 Jer. 27:1, 3, 12 Jer. 28:1 Jer. 29:3, 21f Jer. 32:1, 3ff Jer. 34:2, 4, 6, 8, 21 Jer. 36:12 Jer. 37:1, 3, 17f, 21 Jer. 38:5, 14ff, 19, 24 Jer. 39:1f, 4ff Jer. 44:30 Jer. 49:34 Jer. 51:59 Jer. 52:1, 3, 5, 8, 10f).
- c. The kings are not strictly mentioned in chronological order, but in thematic order. Chapters 21-23 could be called "Messages to the Kings."
- d. King Zedekiah's introduction is in regard to God's prophecy of judgment before its fulfillment. This section could fit into Jer 37-38.
- e. King Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah (2Ki 24:17). We read in 2Ki 24:18-20 that Zedekiah began his reign at 21 years old (597 BC). Like his predecessor, Jehoiakim, he did evil in the sight of the Lord and reigned for eleven years (586 BC).

2. Pashhur the son of Malchijah

- a. This Pashhur was an influential high ranking official, son of Malchijah.
- b. He is not to be confused with Pashhur the priest, son of Immer (Jer 20:1-3).

3. Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah

- a. This was not Zephaniah the prophet, but Zephaniah the priest.
- b. He was the successor of Jehoiada the priest (Jer 29:25-26; 37:3;

52:24).

B. King Zedekiah Pleads for Help

1. Zedekiah had set himself against Nebuchadnezzar, who was king of a great expanding empire. Zedekiah had made an alliance with Egypt whose power had decreased before Babylon.
2. Even though there was a time when Judah did not want to hear Jeremiah's prophecies or prayers, now they needed the Lord's help.
3. He was under constant pressure from his advisors to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. On the other hand, Jeremiah consistently urged Zedekiah to surrender to Babylon. The king could not resist the pressure to seek an alliance with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar. This political maneuvering led to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 b. (Smith, Survey of the OT).
4. In the last chapter (20), the first identification was made of Judah's captor, the "king of Babylon." Now his name is revealed, "Nebuchadnezzar."
 - a. He will be mentioned some 37 times in the book of Jeremiah.
 - b. Nebuchadnezzar... was the son of Nabopolassar, who put him in command of the forces against Egypt and Judah at Carchemish when he was crown prince. Upon his father's death, he returned to Babylon to succeed to the throne (EXP).

II. CONSEQUENCES OF ZEDEKIAH (Jer 21:3-7)

A. The Lord will Turn Back Their Weapons (3-4)

1. The Lord had a specific message for Zedekiah, but also for the people (Jer 21:6) and the house of David (Jer 21:12). In most instances during Israel's history, God intervened at the prophet's intercession. However, God had made it clear that Jeremiah was not to pray for Judah (Jer 7:16; 11:14).
2. God would "turn back the weapons" which meant that God would not fight for Judah and that their weapons would fail them.
3. The Chaldeans (Babylonians) would come from outside the wall and would close Judah inside.
 - a. The Babylonians (Chaldeans) were originally a seminomadic tribe living between northern Arabia and the Persian Gulf.
 - b. In the tenth century B.C., the Assyrians gave the name Kaldu to the area formerly known as the "Sea-Land" (so Harrison). Later, "Chaldea" was used to include Babylonia as a whole (cf. Ezek 23:23; Dan 3:8). They would besiege the wall and set up a blockade so that there would be no escape. Furthermore, they closed in around Judah until the Babylonians were inside the city.

B. The Lord Will War Against Judah (5)

1. Not only would the Lord turn Judah's weapons around, but He would fight against Judah.
2. Emphatically, the Lord declared, "I, Myself" would wage war against them.
3. This is the judgment against sin that invokes the Lord's righteous indignation ("anger and wrath and great indignation").

C. He Will Strike Against Man and Beast (6)

1. Both man and beast will be struck down. The inhabitants of the city would die of a great pestilence.
2. Pestilence, a fatal epidemic of disease and the plague, usually accompanies war; especially for those who are on the losing side.

D. He Will Strike Zedekiah (7)

1. Zedekiah himself will be given over to Nebuchadnezzar (586 BC). More detail will come later in Jeremiah concerning Zedekiah. Zedekiah was not killed but died in blindness, shame, without a throne, and in exile (Jer 34:4; 2Ki 25:6–7; Eze12:13).
2. But the Lord prophesied that their judgment will involve the pestilence, sword, and famine.
3. It will also involve being given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar who is well-known to be without pity or compassion.

III. CHOICE OF WAYS (Jer 21:8-10)

A. Way of Life and Way of Death (8)

1. The Lord does hold out hope for Judah if they repent (cf. Jer 21:12), but it is not likely.
2. They have two ways or choices, repentance which leads to life and deliverance for Judah or obstinate sin and destruction, death, and captivity.

B. Those Within the City will Die (9)

1. The way and choice that leads to death is inevitable. If Judah fights they will be slaughtered. If Judah remains in the city, they will die of famine and pestilence.
2. Judah's slim hope is to surrender to a king who has no mercy. In the event that some surrender, they take only their lives with them ("booty"), nothing else.

C. Set Against the City for Harm (10)

1. The Lord Himself ("My face") is set against Judah. Though some could scarcely escape men, no one can escape the Lord or His judgment.
2. The city will be burned and what doesn't burn will be torn down.

IV. CHOICE OF RESPONSES (Jer 21:11-14)

A. Household of Judah Hear (11)

1. The Lord prophesied in the broad terms of the house of David (12), the lineage of the king, and the house of Judah.
2. If there was hope, it must be immediate obedience to God's Laws.

B. Recipe for Repentance (12)

1. Under the Lord, His Law, and His prophet, the king was to institute obedience and justice.
2. They were to administer justice every morning, not a one-time attempt to

bargain with God. They were to be diligent and consistent.

3. They were to not rob others by their decision but in fact not take advantage of the poor.

4. This consistent obedience would belie God's wrath and fire.

C. Recipe for Disaster (13)

1. However, since they will not repent, He is against them all, from valley dwellers to those who dwell in rocky plains.

2. Note the arrogance of the inhabitants, "Who will come down against us? Or who will enter into our habitations?"

D. A Fire in the Forest (14)

1. A raging fire destroys everything in its path.

2. God's wrath will be greater than a raging fire in a forest.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. Life or death for every man

1. Moses called for such a choice (Deu 30:19); Joshua called for such a choice (Jos 24:15).

2. Joshua called for such a choice (Jos 24:15).

3. Jesus called for such a choice (Joh 3:36; Joh 14:6; 1Jo 5:12-13)

TEXT: Jeremiah 22:1-30

TITLE: ORACLES DIRECTED TO JUDAH'S KINGS – RUINED REIGNS

BIG IDEA:

IDOLATRY AND SPIRITUAL ADULTERY PERVERT GOD'S APPOINTED LEADERS FROM THE MANDATED PATH OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION:

We all would like to end well. We would like the summary of our life and ministry to read like a praiseworthy eulogy. Instead, in this series of oracles directed against very specific kings of Judah we find that God has nothing good to say about their administrations. Their leadership style has been self-indulgent and exploitative and they have failed to meet the essential standard of performing justice and righteousness.

IDOLATRY AND SPIRITUAL ADULTERY PERVERT GOD'S APPOINTED LEADERS FROM THE MANDATED PATH OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

I. (:1-5) GOD MANDATES SOCIAL JUSTICE AS A PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS RULERS – GENERAL PRESCRIPTION = DO JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (:1-2) Message for God's Delegated Rulers

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Go down to the house of the king of Judah, and there speak this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, who sits on David's throne, you and your servants and your people who enter these gates.’”

B. (:3) Mandate for Social Justice

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place.’”

Components of Social Justice:

1. Overall Summary – *“Do justice and righteousness”*

Parunak: *“Do judgment”* refers explicitly to the responsibility of the judge to make fair decisions in cases presented before the court.

2. Free the Oppressed / Set Wrongs Right – *“deliver the one who has been robbed from the power oppressor”*

3. Protect the Vulnerable – *“do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow”*

Thompson: The protection of these three classes is part of the covenant stipulation (**Exod. 22:21-26; 23:9; Lev. 19:33-34; Deut. 10:18-19; 24:17**). The king was as much obligated to fulfil the demands of the Sinai Covenant as were the people. The Davidic covenant (**2 Sam 7**) was no different in this respect from the Mosaic covenant.

4. Do No Harm – “do not shed innocent blood”

Feinberg: The Lord demands that the Davidic throne make justice its primary responsibility. The king was to be addressed publicly in the midst of his court. There is no question that the sins mentioned were present in the reigns of most Judean kings, but in Jehoiakim’s time they were especially rife (cf. **2 Kings 23:35**).

Longman: It was the king’s duty to protect those who could not protect themselves and also create a society that was harmonious for law-abiding citizens. That God through Jeremiah felt it necessary to issue such a proclamation about a requirement found in the law (**Exod. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 27:19**), implies that the kings of Judah were not taking care of their responsibilities in this regard.

C. (:4-5) Measuring Stick of Obedience vs. Disobedience

1. (:4) Blessing for Obedience

“For if you men will indeed perform this thing, then kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David's place on his throne, riding in chariots and on horses, even the king himself and his servants and his people.”

Parunak: Picture of Messianic Restoration:

The picture is of David restored to his throne, with his viceroys ruling for him. This is a common messianic picture in the prophets:

- a> JER 30:9 But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them.
- b> EZE 34:23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.
- c> EZE 34:24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it.
- d> EZE 37:24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.
- e> EZE 37:25 And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever.

2. (:5) Cursing for Disobedience

“But if you will not obey these words, I swear by Myself, declares the LORD, ‘that this house will become a desolation.’”

II. (:6-9) SPIRITUAL ADULTERY DECRIED – GENERAL PROHIBITION = DON'T FORSAKE THE COVENANT

A. (:6-7) The Fate of the Royal Palace in Jerusalem

1. (:6) Transformation from Precious to Desolate

*“For thus says the LORD concerning the house of the king of Judah:
‘You are like Gilead to Me, Like the summit of Lebanon; Yet most
assuredly I shall make you like a wilderness, Like cities which are not
inhabited.’”*

2. (:7) Trees Destined for the Fire

*“For I shall set apart destroyers against you, each with his weapons;
And they will cut down your choicest cedars And throw them on the
fire.”*

B. (:8-9) The Forsaking by God Justified

1. (:8) Astonishment on the Part of the Watching Nations

*“And many nations will pass by this city; and they will say to one
another, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this great city?’”*

Longman: Foreigners who pass by the future ruins will ask each other the reason for such a horrific destruction.

2. (:9) Adultery in the Form of Idolatry Offered Up as Justification

*“Then they will answer, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the LORD
their God and bowed down to other gods and served them.’”*

III. (:10-12) PERMANENT SEPARATION FROM THE PROMISED LAND IS A CAUSE FOR GREAT MOURNING – THE FATE OF SHALLUM (JEHOAHAZ)

A (:10) Sad Legacy

*“Do not weep for the dead or mourn for him, But weep continually for the one
who goes away; For he will never return Or see his native land.”*

Feinberg: Jeremiah tells the nation at large that they need not mourn the death of the godly king Josiah (v. 10), who had been slain at the Battle of Megiddo in 609 B.C. (cf. 2 Kings 23:29-35; 2 Chron 35:25; Zech 12:11). It had become customary among God’s people to sing dirges for departed rulers. But now they were to reserve their weeping for Josiah’s son Shallum-Jehoahaz (v. 11), who was to be forever exiled from the land.

B. (:11-12) Permanent Rejection

*“For thus says the LORD in regard to Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah,
who became king in the place of Josiah his father, who went forth from this
place, ‘He will never return there; but in the place where they led him captive,
there he will die and not see this land again.’”*

MacArthur: Name Shallum was given to him in irony, because the people called him Shalom (“*peace*”), but Shallum means “*retribution*.”

IV. (:13-19) GOD VALUES SOCIAL JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS OVER PERSONAL PALATIAL SPLENDOR – THE FATE OF JEHOIAKIM

Thompson: This passage is almost completely poetic. It probably comprises two short oracles, the first condemning Jehoiakim for his injustice, avarice, and tyranny (vv. 13-17), and the second (vv. 18b, 19) introduced by a brief prose section (v. 18a), announcing a terrible judgment on him. Jehoiakim was condemned by Jeremiah more severely than any other king.

Mackay: The section has a chiasmatic structure.

The oracle of vv. 13-15a exposes and criticizes the actions of the unnamed king, and is followed by a positive statement of his father’s conduct (vv. 15b-16).

This is completed by further criticism of the king in v. 17 before a sentence of condemnation in vv. 18-19 is explicitly uttered against Jehoiakim.

A. (:13-15a) God Condemns Self Indulgent Leaders Who Try to Look Impressive at the Expense of Justice and Compassion

1. Three Common Leadership Failures

a. Self Advancement at the Expense of Righteousness and Justice

“Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness and his upper rooms without justice,”

b. Burdensome Exploitation and Oppression

“Who uses his neighbor’s services without pay and does not give him his wages, “

c. Substituting Personal Agendas for God’s Kingdom Purposes

“Who says, ‘I will build myself a roomy house With spacious upper rooms, And cut out its windows, Paneling it with cedar and painting it bright red.’”

2. Fundamental Error in Perspective – Confusing Impressive External Glitz for the Heart Righteousness that God Values and Wants to See Implemented

“Do you become a king because you are competing in cedar?”

[“But a beautiful palace does not make a great king.” -- Living Bible]

B. (:15b-16) God Commends Leaders Who Live in Moderation While Ruling with Justice and Compassion

1. Practicing Justice and Righteousness Compels God to Provide for Your Needs

*“Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.”*

2. Putting the Priority on Justice and Compassion Ensures the Corporate Well-Being

“He pled the cause of the afflicted and needy; Then it was well.”

3. Practicing Justice and Righteousness is Consistent with Knowing God

“Is not that what it means to know Me? Declares the LORD.”

C. (:17) God Calls Out Leaders Who Pervert Justice and Righteousness to Feather Their Own Nests – In 3 Specific Areas

1. Bankrupting the People – Seeking Dishonest Personal Gain at the Expense of Others

“But your eyes and your heart are intent only upon your own dishonest gain,”

2. Bleeding the People – Intimidating and Harming People by a Domineering Rule

“And on shedding innocent blood”

3. Burdening the People – Using Political Power to Take Advantage of the Weak

“And on practicing oppression and extortion.”

D. (:18-19) God Consigns Self Indulgent Leaders to an Ignominious Burial – No Valued Legacy

Def. of ignominious -- marked with or characterized by disgrace or shame : dishonorable. deserving of shame or infamy : despicable. humiliating, degrading

1. (:18) Good Riddance

“Therefore thus says the LORD in regard to Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, ‘They will not lament for him: Alas, my brother! or, Alas, sister! They will not lament for him: Alas for the master! or, Alas for his splendor!’”

2. (:19) Disrespect and Shame

*“He will be buried with a donkey's burial,
Dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.”*

Longman: Jehoiakim’s death will not be met with mourning. . . Jeremiah envisions that his death will be greeted with indifference at best and joy at worst. Also he will have a contemptible funeral like that of a donkey.

V. (:20-23) CALL TO MOURNING FOR STUBBORN REBELLION LEADING TO SHAME, HUMILIATION, CAPTIVITY AND SUFFERING – FATE OF JERUSALEM

Mackay: Verses 20-23 follow up the implications for the land of having kings of the caliber of Jehoiakim. Divine speech is addressed in the feminine singular to Daughter Zion, the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Their conduct is shown not to have changed since the days of Jeremiah's early ministry, with the obstinate defiance of v. 21 reminding one of their earlier responses in 2:20, 213, 25, 31, 35.

A. (:20) Widespread Mourning Throughout the Land

*“Go up to Lebanon and cry out, and lift up your voice in Bashan;
Cry out also from Abarim, for all your lovers have been crushed.”*

Feinberg: This is a call to mourning. Jeremiah is calling on his contemporaries (included in Jerusalem, for the verbs are in the feminine gender) to mourn the disastrous results brought on the land by the foolish international policy of Jehoikim. The occasion was probably the eve of Nebuchadnezzar's expedition against Judah. The regions mentioned – Lebanon, Bashan, and Abarim – represent the land in its entirety, from north to northeast to southeast. The invaders would overrun the whole land.

Thompson: The *lovers* are her political allies, who have been *broken* (cf. Hos. 8:9).

Feinberg: Scholars differ widely about the identity of the “*allies*” in vv. 20, 22. Some claim they are Jerusalem's faithful patriots, such as Ezekiel the prophet (so Bewer). Others hold that the leaders of the nation are probably intended (so Cunliffe-Jones). Still others see them as Egypt and other nations Jehoiakim relied on for aid against the Babylonians. All three views are held by reputable scholars. The last one, however, is preferable because of the immediate context (v. 22, where there is a contrast with the nation's leaders – “*your shepherds*”) and the broad context (cf. 4:30); so NIV translates the word as “*allies*,” not “*lovers*.”

B. (:21) Persistent Stubborn Rebellion Throughout Your Days

“I spoke to you in your prosperity; But you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your practice from your youth, that you have not obeyed My voice.”

Thompson: It was only a matter of time before the divine judgment would fall.

C. (:22) Shame and Humiliation and Captivity

“The wind will sweep away all your shepherds, and your lovers will go into captivity; Then you will surely be ashamed and humiliated Because of all your wickedness.”

Mackay: “*Wind*” refers to God's judgment in the form of invading armies (4:11-12; 13:24; 18:17). “*Shepherds*” relates principally to the rulers of the nation (2:8; 10:21;

23:1-4), who are no longer going to be around to provide pasture for the people where they can feel secure.

D. (:23) Extreme Pain and Suffering

“You who dwell in Lebanon, nested in the cedars, How you will groan when pangs come upon you, Pain like a woman in childbirth!”

Wiersbe: The king and his nobles, living carelessly in the cedar palace (“Lebanon”), would soon suffer terrible pain like a woman in travail. The Lord had warned them, but they felt so secure that they wouldn’t listen.

VI. (:24-30) PERMANENT SEPARATION FROM THE PROMISED LAND AND REMOVAL FROM THE DAVIDIC DYNASTY CONSTITUTE THE ULTIMATE ROYAL CONDEMNATION FATE OF CONIAH (JEHOIACHIN)

A. (:24-27) Separated

1. (:24-25) Controlled by Your Dreaded Enemies

“As I live,’ declares the LORD, ‘even though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were a signet ring on My right hand, yet I would pull you off; and I shall give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.’”

Constable: The Lord affirmed that even if Coniah (Jehoiachin) was the signet ring on His hand, He would still remove him. The signet ring of a king was something a king did not part with, because it was the instrument with which he conducted business and manifested his authority.

2. (:26-27) Captive in a Foreign Land Where You Will Die

“I shall hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country where you were not born, and there you will die. But as for the land to which they desire to return, they will not return to it.”

Thompson: An important part of any man’s basic security was to live in his own land. A land and a people belonged together. Any separation of the two was a disaster. A land needs a people and a people needs a land. Little wonder that Jeremiah referred to the desperate yearning to return.

B. (:28-30) Shattered

1. (:28) Broken and Unwanted Vessel

“Is this man Coniah a despised, shattered jar? Or is he an undesirable vessel? Why have he and his descendants been hurled out and cast into a land that they had not known?”

Thompson: Coniah and his family have been cast out as something unwanted and sent to a land unknown. The parallel with the rejected flask of **ch. 19** is clear enough.

2. (:29-30) Broken Off From the Davidic Dynasty

“O land, land, land, Hear the word of the LORD! Thus says the LORD, Write this man down childless, A man who will not prosper in his days; For no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.”

Mackay: The emphatic threefold repetition of the word shows the prophet expressing his anguish, bewilderment and exasperation at the spiritual hardness of the people. Will they never listen and learn?

Constable: The Lord promised that none of Coniah’s sons would sit on Judah’s throne. It was a shame and a disgrace for a king to have no son to succeed him. Coniah had seven sons (**1 Chronicles 3:17-18; Matthew 1:12**), but none of them ruled as Davidic kings. Zerubbabel, his grandson (**1 Chronicles 3:19**), returned to the land as one of the foremost leaders of the restoration community (cf. Ezra 1-6), but he was not a king.

MacArthur: The curse continued in his descendants down to Joseph, the husband of Mary. How could Jesus then be the Messiah when His father was under this curse? It was because Joseph was not involved in the blood line of Jesus since He was virgin born (**Mt 1:12**). Jesus’ blood right to the throne of David came through Mary from Nathan, Solomon’s brother, not Solomon (Jeconiah’s line) thus bypassing this curse.

Feinberg: Jehoiachin was thus the last of the Judean kings. In him the royal line became extinct. So **chapter 23** goes on to speak of the new King to be raised up by the Lord (cf. **23:5-6**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why did these kings fail to obey God’s covenant requirements and lead the people down the right path?
- 2) What correlation can you see between some of the specific areas of leadership failure evidenced by these kings of Judah and corresponding leadership failures in the Christian Church today?
- 3) Who is responsible to administer social justice in our context today?
- 4) How do you reconcile God’s promises of future restoration and Messianic blessing with these very specific prophecies related to permanent removal of these specific kings from the blessings associated with the Promised Land?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Stedman: Jeremiah was sent to tell this king that this was what was wrong in his life. He had failed to correct the wrongs of the land, had failed to "*deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who had been robbed*", and had failed himself to be a pattern of justice and righteousness.

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

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

Clarence Weaver Sr: God Demands a Just Society

The word "woe" is used as preparation for a declaration of judgment and condemnation. The charges against Jehoiakim are injustice, pride, arrogance, greed, and oppression of the poor and laborers and the lack of right priorities as king.

- Injustice: unfairness, prejudice, wrong, and discrimination.
- Pride: conceited, self-importance, proud, and vain
- Arrogance: haughtiness, egotism, and overconfidence
- Greed: gluttony, ravenousness, desire, and insatiability
- Oppression: domination, subjugation, and cruelty

People that have those kinds of spirits don't care who is hurt or how it is paid for. There is nothing wrong with anyone having things to reflect their position, however the motivation behind obtaining them will always be the judge.

King Jehoiakim's was condemned for his wicked reign of injustice, covetousness, violence, oppression, and bloodshed.

- Injustice: (James 3:16 AMP) For where there is jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry and selfish ambition) there will also be confusion (unrest, disharmony, rebellion) and all sorts of evil practices. He oppressed the poor with every decision, they sought to get all they could from those who could least afford to give and then misused and abused everything they received.

- Covetousness: (James 4:2-3 AMP) (Verse 2) You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your desires go unfulfilled; [so] you become murders [To hate is to murder as far as your heart is concerned.] You burn with envy and anger and are not able to obtain [the gratification, the contentment and the happiness that you seek], so you fight and war. You do not have because you do not ask. [See 1 John 3:15]. (Verse 3) [Or] you do ask [God for them] and yet you fail to receive, because you ask with wrong purpose, and evil, selfish motives. Your intention is, [when you get what you desire] to spend it in sensual pleasures.

Longman: The previous chapter issued an oracle against Zedekiah, and now the prophet continues the diatribe against Judah's kings. At first the oracle is addressed to the "*King of Judah*" without specification (22:1-10). After this initial speech Jeremiah addresses Shallum (22:11-17 also known as Jehoahaz, who ruled for only a few months in 609 B.C.). Then (22:18-23), he turns his attention to Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.), followed by Jehoaquin, who ruled only a few months in Jerusalem before he was taken away in captivity to Babylon and replaced by Zedekiah, the last king of Judah (597-586 B.C.). In essence, these oracles cover the post-Josianic kings who ruled during the period of Jeremiah's prophetic activity.

Peter Wallace: (Chaps. 21-22) The Righteousness of the King

Death is no fun. In some ways the human body is delicate and fragile – but when it comes to relinquishing life, we are amazingly resilient and stubborn. But exile is worse than death. Think back to Abraham. When Sarah dies, Abraham wants to buy a burial plot for her. In Genesis 23, Abraham goes to the Hittites and asks for a burying place. They offer to let him bury his dead in their tombs. Abraham refuses. Now, you need to understand ancient near eastern burial practices. They would have an underground vault or cave, with stone platforms where they would put the deceased. When the body had rotted away, they would push the bones off the platform, so that the bones of many generations would pile up in the tomb. Abraham does not want the bones of his wife to mingle with the bones of those who are under God's curse. Abraham lived in the land – but the Promised Land was not yet what it should be. He lived as a sojourner and a foreigner in the land of Promise. But Abraham was not in exile! Abraham lived in the Land of Promise – awaiting the fulfillment of what God had said. Now, more than a thousand years later, his descendants would be exiled from the land – banished by God for their sins!

So far in Jeremiah we have heard a lot of sermonic material – but we haven't been told much about when it was delivered. In chapter 1 we heard that Jeremiah preached over a thirty year period. In chapter 3 we heard that Jeremiah preached "in the days of King

Josiah.” There are several references to undated events in chapters 11, 14, 17, and 19. But here in chapter 21 we have the first clear reference to a particular datable event – the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. Introduction: A Fate Worse Than Death – the Sons of Josiah Josiah reigned from 640-609 BC. He died in battle against Egypt. Then his son, Jehoahaz (also called Shallum), reigned for three months in 609 BC and replaced him with his brother, Jehoiakim (who was more friendly to Egypt).

Jehoiakim reigned for 11 years (609-598), vacillating between allegiance to Egypt and allegiance to Babylon. He died during Nebuchadnezzar’s first siege of Jerusalem in 598 BC, and was replaced by his son, Jeconiah (or Jeconiah or Jehoiachin). Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, reigned for three months. Finally, Jeconiah surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar in early 597 BC and he and the elite of Jerusalem were taken into captivity (Ezekiel the prophet was one of the exiles at this time). Nebuchadnezzar took Jeconiah back to Babylon and installed his uncle Zedekiah, the last remaining son of Josiah, as king in place of his nephew.

It appears from the text that chapters 21-22 were spoken at different times. Jeremiah 21:1 tells us that this is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent messengers to him as Nebuchadnezzar invaded (587), but Jeremiah 22:18 speaks of Jehoiakim as though he was still alive (he died eleven years earlier in 598). But the whole passage fits together as an indictment of the sons of Josiah, showing us how much we need Jesus – a king who will do justice! We will hear later in Jeremiah about the response to Jeremiah’s preaching here – but for now, Jeremiah just gives us the message.

1. The Way of Life Is Surrender (21:1-14)

The Inquiry: Will the LORD Save Us with His Wonderful Deeds? (v1-2)

The messengers had asked Jeremiah to inquire of the LORD. Would the LORD do for Zedekiah what he had done for Hezekiah a century ago? Would the LORD make Nebuchadnezzar withdraw? The false prophets of Jeremiah’s day would all have been anticipating Paul’s great line: “if God is for us, who can be against us?!” But Jeremiah has a different calling than Isaiah! There is no more time. There will be no delay. The LORD will fight against Zedekiah!

a. The Answer of the LORD to Zedekiah: I Will Fight Against You (v3-7)

It sounds pretty much hopeless! But the LORD gives to the people of Jerusalem one glimmer of hope:

b. The Answer of the LORD to This People: Surrender and You Shall Live (v8-10)

Jeremiah uses the language of Deuteronomy 30 – the way of life and the way of death. But everything has been turned on its head! In Isaiah’s day the way of life was to withstand the siege of the Assyrians. The way of death was to ally with foreign powers. Hezekiah was told not to surrender.

But the LORD has abandoned Jerusalem: 10 For I have set my face against this city for

harm [literally, “for evil”] and not for good, declares the LORD: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.’ Jerusalem is no longer the city of God. Jeremiah wants you to understand that no earthly city can protect you! Even the city that God himself chose to be his dwelling place!

Now, many would have replied to Jeremiah – “But Jeremiah, God promised! He said that he would bless Jerusalem – the city where his name dwells! He said that he would bless the house of David forever!” And so in verse 11 the LORD explains why he has turned away from the house of David:

c. The Answer of the LORD to the House of David: Execute Justice in the Morning – Because I Will Judge You According to Your Deeds (v11-14)

Jeremiah is not saying that the house of David can escape the coming judgment. Jeremiah is saying that the house of David could have escaped the coming judgment. Jeremiah is reminding Jerusalem that the covenant with David had conditions. Yes, God promised that he would bless the house of David forever – but he also said if the sons of David rebelled against him, then he would cut them off from his presence.

And so in verses 13-14, the LORD says that he will judge his people “according to the fruit of your deeds.” 13 “Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley, O rock of the plain, declares the LORD; you who say, ‘Who shall come down against us, or who shall enter our habitations?’ 14 I will punish you according to the fruit of your deeds, declares the LORD; I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her.” The fire of God’s wrath will devour the city of Jerusalem because the house of David has not done justice.

This sets up chapter 22. We need a king of the House of David who will do justice. Because God did promise to bless the house of David forever. Therefore we need such a king!

2. But You Need a King Who Does Justice and Righteousness (22:1-30)

a. Do Justice and Righteousness – Then the Throne of David Will Endure (22:1-5)

O Zedekiah – do zedekah! Do righteousness! Elsewhere the focus is on idolatry. But here the focus is entirely on how the house of David has treated the helpless. If the king who sits on the throne of David does justice and righteousness then the kingdom of God will endure. You often see this language of “justice and righteousness” in the scriptures. Righteousness and justice can be used as synonyms, but when they are paired like this, there is generally a distinction: righteousness has to do with how you organize your society, justice has to do with particular decisions. A king who does righteousness is one who organizes his realm in a “right” manner. A father who does righteousness is a father whose government of his children is characterized by “right-ness.” How do you organize your community? Is it characterized by love for God and neighbor? Because that is what a righteous community will look like. Justice has to do with particular decisions. (That’s why it said “execute justice in the morning” – it’s referring to a particular case – delivering the one who had been robbed from the hand of his

oppressor).

As we complete the ordination of our new deacons this evening we are reminded that God will judge us based on how we treat the helpless – how we treat those who have no one else to help them. The deacons will be calling on you in future weeks and months to help those in need – to rescue those who are helpless and protect them from those who would oppress them. And as you look around your neighborhood – your community – let us know if there are places where we can work together to show the mercy of Christ to those around us. How do we organize our community to be a place where righteousness flourishes? And while we are working on that – we should not hesitate to do justice day by day. Just because we don't have all the principles fully implemented does not mean that we have to wait on the details! What does it mean this week to do justice in your home, your neighborhood, your workplace? It can be as simple as showing love to a new neighbor down the street – showing hospitality to a stranger. Do not assume that “someone else” will take care of them! If you hear of a situation where someone has been treated unjustly, King Jesus calls us to become their advocate.

Think of the Good Samaritan who became the advocate for the helpless Jew: he was in Jewish territory – a stranger in hostile territory – it would be like if a white man was driving through a black neighborhood and he saw a black man lying by the side of the road. It would be easy to say “someone from around here will surely help...” I don't know the culture. He's got legal problems – and I'm not a lawyer... But who will be their advocate? Maybe you don't know how to help – but you may have connections to someone who does.

If we are seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness then we must be characterized by the righteousness that Jesus has taught us. How do we make disciples? By baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to observe all that Jesus has commanded. Listen to verse 5: 5 But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation. Without justice, without righteousness, you are not part of the kingdom of God!

b. The King Will Return No More to See His Native Land (22:6-10)

In verses 6-7 God says that he will bring destruction on the house of the king of Judah.

i) I Will Bring Destruction (cedars and Lebanon) (v6-7)

But God had also warned David that if his sons forsook his covenant then God would judge them.

ii) Because They Have Forsaken the Covenant of the LORD (v8-9)

And in verses 8-9 God calls the nations to witness. Why has the LORD done this to Jerusalem? 9 And they will answer, “Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and worshiped other gods and served them.”” Notice here that Jeremiah brings back idolatry as the root cause of Jerusalem's fall.

Think of modern liberal churches – whether Protestant or Catholic. In some ways they care for the poor better than we do (to our shame!). But they have set aside the deity of Christ – the resurrection of the body – to the point that some have rejected the Triune God and now baptize “in the name of the mother, of the daughter, and of the womb.” Truly they worship other gods and serve them. And with the corruption of worship – with idolatry – inevitably comes the corruption of righteousness and justice. The same liberal churches will encourage abortion – oppressing the helpless – and now embrace same sex marriage.

But think about what this means: if we see among ourselves a failure to do righteousness and justice, that means that we also have a problem with idolatry! We are loving something more than we love the LORD our God. ⁸ We love our comfort – our stuff. It is uncomfortable to do justice. It may cost us – no, it will cost us – to establish righteousness in our community. Our comfort and our convenience has become our god. And if we do not put away our idols and follow Jesus, then it will destroy us.

Verse 10 is crucial for understanding what God is saying to us:

iii) Exile: A Fate Worse Than Death (v10)

This is not talking about some generic “him.” This is talking about the Son of David. Josiah, the good king, had died a few years before, and his son Shallum (also called Jehoahaz) reigned in his place. But Pharaoh did not like Shallum, and so he carried him away captive to Egypt. Look at verse 11 –

c. The King Will Die in Exile (v11-12)

Shallum may well have still been alive in Egypt. But Jeremiah tells his brother, Zedekiah, that Shallum is not coming back. Do not weep for the dead. There is more hope for the dead than for the exile!

The heart of our passage tonight is found in verses 13-17. What makes a king? What sort of king do we need? We need a king who does righteousness!

d. What Makes a King? Righteousness (v13-17)

Verses 13-14 open with a woe against the unrighteous sons of Josiah. You think that you are a king because you have power and wealth. That is not what makes a king in my kingdom!

15 Do you think you are a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the LORD. Josiah was a king! Your father did justice and righteousness! Your father judged the cause of the poor and needy! “Then it was well!” Is not this to know me? declares the LORD. Notice that Jeremiah does not say that if you know me, then you will do justice. Rather, doing justice is knowing God. You do not come to know God through study. You come to know God through obedience. I want you to think about that.

I recently heard a friend say that Bible study wasn't drawing him near to God. That's not surprising! We do not study our Bibles in order to draw near to God. We study our Bibles so that we might know what we are to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of us. It certainly helps to know these things! But we only know God through believing and doing what he says.

Until the printing press, generations of Christians did not have access to Bibles. But they often knew God better than we do! How? Because they heard enough in the public reading and preaching of the Word to know what to believe and what to do. It is wonderful that you can all have your own Bible. I highly recommend that you read it daily. It's a great privilege! But nowhere in Scripture are you commanded to read your Bible every day.

Jeremiah says that the way you know God is by doing justice and righteousness, and judging the cause of the poor and needy. Now, children, this includes you! How do you judge the cause of the poor and needy? When you see another child being bullied or mistreated – you can stand up for them! You can say, “No, that's wrong – stop it!” All of you can do justice – and stand up for the poor and needy.

Indeed, we see this most beautifully in Jesus the faithful Son of David who knew the Father. His righteousness was expressed in how he cared for the poor and needy – and how he laid down his life to save us – who could not possibly have saved ourselves! As Paul says, “have this same mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

The righteousness of the kingdom of Jesus is a righteousness that does not concern itself with personal gain. “Let each of you look not to his own interests – but rather to the interests of others.” 17 But you have eyes and heart only for your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.” Now, remember, who is the “you” here? Look at verse 18:

c'. The King Will Die in Exile (v18-19)

There is nothing worse than having no one to lament your death. Jehoiakim was king. He was of the house of David – a son of the great king Josiah! He reigned for 11 years – from 609 to 598 BC. Surely someone would lament his death?! Jehoiakim died during the siege of 598 BC. We'll hear in a few chapters (ch 36) that Jehoiakim listened to the book of Jeremiah's prophecies and as they were read, he cut off the part of the scroll that had been read and threw it in the fire! A king who is characterized by injustice will not be lamented. And so he will be dragged out of the city and dumped beyond the gates of Jerusalem.

b'. You and Your Mother Will Not Return to the Land (v20-27)

And then in verses 20-27, the LORD speaks to Jerusalem (the “you” is a feminine second person singular).

i) You Refused to Listen to Me (v20-21)

This has been your way from your youth, that you have not obeyed my voice. Jerusalem has not listened to the LORD.

ii) So You Will Ashamed and Confounded: Cedars and Lebanon (v22-23)

Jerusalem had been glorified with cedars from Lebanon – but now Jerusalem has chased after many lovers – foreign gods who cannot save. Lebanon is a fitting image for this: after all, the royal house of Lebanon was the king of Tyre – Jezebel was a princess from that house – and she had led Ahab astray. The royal family in Jerusalem had shifted back and forth in their alliances with Egypt and Babylon – and so they would be put to shame.

iii) Exile: There You Shall Die (v24-27)

Then in verse 24 it shifts back to the masculine second person singular. The son of David was supposed to be a signet ring on God’s right hand. The king wore a ring that he would use to stamp a document as authentic. If it has the king’s stamp, then you know that it is the king’s decree. But God says that Coniah is a worthless signet ring. Coniah keeps stamping decrees that are not from the LORD! He does not do justice and righteousness in Jerusalem. And so God will hurl Coniah into Babylon – together with his mother!

The queen mother is brought into the story in verse 26 because the queen mother was often a key player in forming alliances. God had promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent’s head – but when the queen mother leads her son astray, she, too, will go into exile and die there. And the LORD concludes by warning the Land of Israel:

a’. None of His Offspring Shall Sit on the Throne of David (v28-30)

Coniah (or Jehoiachin) had children – but he might as well be childless, because his sons would never sit on the throne of David. Our Lord Jesus was descended from David, but not through Jehoiachin. Exile is a fate worse than death: the one who is cast out of the land into Exile dies to return no more, but the one who dies in the land may be raised from the dead and return to the land!

Our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of God on the throne of his father David. And he has established justice and righteousness. Doesn’t this explain so much of what we see in the gospels? Why does Jesus heal the sick? cast out demons? Why does Jesus tell us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness? Because Jesus has come as the Son of David who will become all that the house of David had failed to be! And because Jesus is all that the house of David failed to be (and all that Israel failed to be – and all that Adam failed to be!) therefore those who believe in Jesus are justified in him – and as the justified community – as the

righteous people of God – we must now exhibit that righteousness to the watching world.

TEXT: Jeremiah 23:1-40

TITLE: FALSE PROPHETS DENOUNCED

BIG IDEA:

COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL SHEPHERDS SUBSTITUTE THEIR OWN PEACEFUL IMAGINATIONS FOR GOD'S AUTHENTIC REVELATION OF JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

Jeremiah understood what was involved in faithfully proclaiming God's Word – no matter how unpopular the message. He was willing to pay the price of being mocked and flogged and cast into prison and thrown into a deep pit of quicksand type of mud that required 30 strong men to haul him out. He refused to recant or soften his message or accommodate the demands of sinful leaders. He looked forward to the day when God would raise up a Righteous Branch from the root of David who would administer righteousness and faithfully shepherd God's people. He denounced the destructive influence of counterfeit shepherds – calling them to account and exposing the futility of following their manmade counsel. Ultimately, God will have the last word and mock those who mock the faithful proclamation of God's strong word of judgment.

MacArthur: Other significant chapters which condemn evil shepherds and false prophets include chaps. 14, 27, 28; Is 28; Eze 13, 34; Mic 3; Zec 11.

COUNTERFEIT SPIRITUAL SHEPHERDS SUBSTITUTE THEIR OWN PEACEFUL IMAGINATIONS FOR GOD'S AUTHENTIC REVELATION OF JUDGMENT

I. (:1-2) EVIL SHEPHERDS FACE DIVINE ACCOUNTABILITY

A. Evil Practices of Counterfeit Spiritual Shepherds

1. Injurious Shepherding

“Destroying and Scattering the sheep of My pasture”

“Scattered My flock and driven them away”

Parunak: *“Destroy and scatter”*: the sin for which they are judged.

1) First sin: they destroy the sheep, cause them to perish. By implication, what a shepherd should do for the sheep is protect them from outside dangers.

2) Second sin: they scatter the sheep. By contrast, a shepherd should keep the flock together, gather them into a safe fold, and if one is missing, go out and find it.

3) We will see these two features over and over in this paragraph. It's worth noting at the outset that they correspond perfectly to the two great dangers that Paul pointed out to the elders at Ephesus in **Acts 20:29-30**, the dangers of wolves coming in to destroy and of false teachers scattering sheep away.

2. Inattentive Shepherding

“Concerning the shepherds who are tending My people”

“Have not attended to them”

B. Emphatic Warning Woes

1. Pronouncement of Woe

“Woe to the shepherds”

2. Promise of Impending Judgment for Evil Deeds

“Behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds”

Feinberg: By a play on words, Jeremiah uses the double sense of the Hebrew word *paqad* (“to care for,” “to chastize”): the shepherds had “*not bestowed care on*” the flock; so God would “*bestow punishment on*” them in judgment (v. 2).

Jamieson: just retribution. Play upon the double sense of “*visit*.” “Visit upon,” namely, in wrath (Ex 32:34).

II. (:3-8) GOD’S FAITHFUL SHEPHERD (THE MESSIAH) WILL ULTIMATELY REIGN IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

A. (:3-4) Future Restoration to Fruitfulness and Security

(Both near term and eschatological fulfillment)

1. The Bringing About of Restoration – How will God accomplish it?

a. Recapturing / Gathering

“Then I myself will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them”

MacArthur: The restoration of Judah from Babylon is referred to in language which in its fullness can only refer to the final restoration of God’s people under Messiah. . . . Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others were small fulfillments compared to the consummate shepherding of the Messiah Jesus.

b. Relocation

“bring them back to their pasture”

c. Raise Up Faithful Shepherds

“I will also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them”

2. The Blessings of Restoration – What will God provide?

a. Feeding – pleasant grazing

“and bring them back to their pasture”

b. Fruitfulness

“and they will be fruitful and multiply”

c. Security

“and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified”

d. Permanence

“nor will any be missing”

Matthew Henry: Here is a word of comfort to the neglected sheep. Though the under-shepherds take no care of them, no pains with them, but betray them, the chief Shepherd will look after them. When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord taketh me up. Though the

interests of God's church in the world are neglected by those who should take care of them, and postponed to their own private secular interests, yet they shall not therefore sink. God will perform his promise, though those he employs do not perform their duty.

B. (:5-6) Faithful Shepherding of the Righteous King (the Messiah)

1. (:5) Righteous Characterization of His Reign

*“I will raise up for David a righteous Branch;
And He will reign as king and act wisely
And do justice and righteousness in the land”*

Parunak: “a legitimate scion.” The point of “righteous” is not that the king is morally upright (though of course he is), but that he is legitimate, entitled to the throne. The suggestion is that the current Judean kings are not legitimate. They were set up by foreign powers, and were only puppets.

2. (:6a) Righteous Results of His Reign – Salvation and Security

“In His days Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell securely”

3. (:6b) Righteous Name

*“And this is His name by which He will be called,
The Lord our righteousness.”*

C. (:7-8) Favorite Testimony Switches from Historical Exodus to Eschatological Restoration --

The newer demonstration of God's mercy and power trumps the former demonstration

1. (:7) Testimony of Historical Exodus

“Therefore behold, the days are coming,” declares the Lord, ‘when they will no longer say, As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt.’”

2. (:8a) Testimony of Eschatological Restoration

“but, ‘As the Lord lives, who brought up and led back the descendants of the household of Israel from the north land and from all the countries where I had driven them.’”

3. (:8b) Territory of the Promised Land Possessed and Enjoyed

“Then they will live on their own soil.”

Parunak: Passages like these led the Christians of the first three centuries to believe in a national restoration of Israel. Not until Constantine did amillennialism become the predominant belief of the church.

III. (:9-15) EVIL SHEPHERDS DESERVE GOD'S CONDEMNATION

A. (:9-12) Corrupt Leadership Calls for Calamity – Deserving of Punishment

1. (:9) Lamenting Over Corrupt Prophets

“As for the prophets: My heart is broken within me, All my bones tremble; I have become like a drunken man, Even like a man overcome with wine, Because of the LORD And because of His holy words.”

2. (:10-11) Lamenting Over Corrupt Priests as Well

“For the land is full of adulterers; For the land mourns because of the curse. The pastures of the wilderness have dried up. Their course also is evil, And their might is not right. For both prophet and priest are polluted; Even in My house I have found their wickedness,’ declares the LORD.”

3. (:12) Promising Their Punishment = Calamity from the Lord

“Therefore their way will be like slippery paths to them, They will be driven away into the gloom and fall down in it; For I shall bring calamity upon them, The year of their punishment,’ declares the LORD.”

Dyer: These leaders had such a low view of God’s holy character that they would even pollute His temple with their wickedness. Because of their sin God vowed to bring disaster on them.

Jamieson: “Jerusalem” and Judah were even worse than “Samaria” and the ten tribes; the greater were the privileges of the former, the greater was their guilt. They had the temple in their midst, which the ten tribes had not; yet in the temple itself they practised idolatry.

B. (:13-15) Cancerous Idolatry Degenerates to Depravity – Deserving of Poison

1. (:13) Offensive Idolatry

“Moreover, among the prophets of Samaria I saw an offensive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led My people Israel astray.”

2. (:14a) Horrible Spiritual Adultery

“Also among the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness.”

3. (:14b) Disgusting Depravity

“All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah.

4. (:15) Pollution Deserving of Poison

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the prophets, ‘Behold, I am going to feed them wormwood And make them drink poisonous water, For from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone forth into all the land.’”

IV. (:16-24) FOLLOWING EVIL SHEPHERDS LEADS ONLY TO FUTILITY

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts,
‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you,
They are leading you into futility;”*

7 Reasons:

A. (:16) Because the Source of Their Message is Human Rather than Divine

“They speak a vision of their own imagination.”

B. (:17) Because the Security They Offer is False

*“They keep saying to those who despise Me,
The Lord has said, ‘You will have peace’,
And as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart,
They say, ‘Calamity will not come upon you.’”*

C. (:18) Because the Stiff-Necked Nature of These Prophets is Evident

*“But who has stood in the council of the Lord,
That he should see and hear His word?
Who has given heed to His word and listened?”*

D. (:19-20) Because the Severity of God’s Judgment Will Soon Be Seen

*“Behold, the storm of the Lord has gone forth in wrath,
Even a whirling tempest;
It will swirl down on the head of the wicked.
The anger of the Lord will not turn back
Until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart;
In the last days you will clearly understand it.”*

E. (:21) Because the Sending of These Prophets Carries No Authority

*“I did not send these prophets, but they ran.
I did not speak to them, but they prophesied.”*

F. (:22) Because the Senselessness of These Prophets is Incredible

*“But if they had stood in My council,
Then they would have announced My words to My people,
And would have turned them back from their evil way
And from the evil of their deeds.”*

Thompson: Here lie two important features of the true prophet – the divine sending and the divine word. In the absence of these, prophets had no authority and no clear understanding of the purposes of God. Not having been in his council (cf. **14:14; 27:15; 29:9**) they had no word to proclaim, nor could they turn the nation away from its evil course and its evil deeds. Indeed, they could not discern in their fellows the kinds of activities which were an offense to Yahweh. The task of the true prophet was to convict people of their sinfulness. To do that he himself would need to have a clear understanding of the nature of the covenant and its demands upon the people of God. The only acceptable response to their election and their high calling was in terms of holiness and righteousness and utter loyalty to Yahweh the sovereign Lord of the covenant.

G. (:23-24) Because the Sight of God Reaches to All Corners of the Universe

*“‘Am I a God who is near,’ declares the Lord,
‘And not a God far off?’
Can a man hide himself in hiding places
So I do not see him?’ declares the Lord.
‘Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?’ declares the Lord.”*

MacArthur: Let not false prophets think they can hide their devices from God, who declares Himself omnipresent and omniscient, in both an immanent and transcendent sense.

Mackay: Zion theology emphasized the indwelling of the Lord in the Temple and tended to limit God and restrict divine freedom. The Lord simply had to act on behalf of Jerusalem because he had presenced himself there. Over against such a comfortable theology with a narrow and localized conception of the divine, the question denies the possibility of restricting God to any physical locality. He is transcendent, and his lofty majesty must ever be kept in mind. His sovereign power is a function of his exalted status. His power is not limited by his transcendence as though God was removed to a distance and so rendered impotent. Divine exaltation does not impair God's ability to see into the hearts of all people (**Ps. 33:13-15**) and to judge what they do (**Pss. 11:4-5; 113:5-6**).

V. (:25-32) GOD OPPOSES FALSE PROPHETS THAT DECEPTIVELY CLAIM DIVINE REVELATION

A. (:25-27) The Obscuring of Truth by False Prophets

1. (:25) Invalid Claims to Divine Revelation – God is not fooled

“I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy falsely in My name, saying, ‘I had a dream, I had a dream!’”

2. (:26) Initiated in Deception and Propagating Falsehood

“How long? Is there anything in the hearts of the prophets who prophesy falsehood, even these prophets of the deception of their own heart”

3. (:27) Intended to Promote Idolatry – not a new strategy

“who intend to make My people forget My name by their dreams which they relate to one another, just as their fathers forgot My name because of Baal.”

B. (:28-29) The Omnipotent Nature of God's Word

1. (:28) Huge Distinction Between Divine Revelation and Personal Thoughts

“The prophet who has a dream may relate his dream, but let him who has My word speak My word in truth. What does straw have in common with grain?” declares the Lord.”

2. (:29) 2 Analogies Proving the Power of God's Word in Judgment

a. Analogy of Fire – Devours and Consumes in Judgment

“Is not my Word like fire?” declares the Lord”

b. Analogy of a Hammer – Smashes and Obliterates in Judgment

“and like a hammer which shatters a rock?””

Jamieson: As the "fire" consumes the "chaff," [Jer 23:28], so "My word" will consume the false prophets (**Mt 3:12; Heb 4:12**). "My word" which is "wheat" [**Jer 23:28**], that is, food to the true prophet and his hearers, is a consuming "fire," and a crushing "hammer" (**Mt 21:44**) to false prophets and their followers (**2Co 2:16**). The Word of the false prophets may be known by its promising men peace in sin. "My word," on the contrary, burns and breaks the hard-hearted (**Jer 20:9**). The "hammer" symbolizes destructive power (**Jer 50:23; Na 2:1**, Margin).

Longman: God's word is like fire and a hammer, two images that suggest devastating judgment. We may presume that the false message of the lying prophets concerned peace and not judgment.

C. (:30-32) The Opposition of God to False Prophets – Characterizes their Counterfeit Ministry:

1. (:30) Copy Cat Plagiarism (instead of divine revelation)
“Therefore behold, I am against the prophets,’ declares the Lord, ‘who steal My words from each other.’”

2. (:31) Outright Lying
“Behold, I am against the prophets,’ declares the Lord, ‘who use their tongues and declare, The Lord declares.’”

3. (:32a) Deceptive and Reckless
“Behold, I am against those who have prophesied false dreams,’ declares the Lord, ‘and related them and led My people astray by their falsehoods and reckless boasting.’”

4. (:32b) No Divine Authorization or Spiritual Benefit
“yet I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit,’ declares the Lord.”

Feinberg: Jeremiah describes three classes of false prophets. Three times he declares that the Lord is against the false prophets; each verse begins with a statement of the opposition of God to the godless seers. The first group of lying prophets are those who misappropriate the prophecies of the true prophets, giving them out as their own (v. 30). To their lies they add plagiarism; their words were not original but stolen from others. Here was spiritual bankruptcy indeed! A second group are accused of using their tongues as the main weapon in their deceptions. They use their tongues too freely (v. 31). They “wag” them to introduce their lies by the formula of the true prophets “*The Lord declares.*” They did this to give their words a ring of authenticity. They merely pretended divine authorization. The last group included those with whom national interests were paramount (v. 2). Their words – true or not – must, they felt, lift national morale. No wonder the prophet refers to their speech as empty talk.

VI. (:33-40) GOD WILL HAVE THE LAST WORD – GOD SARCASTICALLY MOCKS THOSE WHO MOCKINGLY REJECT THE HARSH TRUTH OF GOD’S LEGITIMATE REVELATION OF COMING JUDGMENT

Read this section in The Living Bible for impact of sarcasm:

When one of the people or one of their “prophets” or priests asks you, “Well, Jeremiah, what is the sad news from the Lord today?” You shall reply, “What sad news? You are the sad news, for the Lord has cast you away!” (23:33)

A. (:33-38) Four Responses to Those Mocking Faithful Preaching

1. (:33) First Response: The Lord will Abandon you
“Now when this people or the prophet or a priest asks you saying, What is the oracle of the Lord? then you shall say to them, What oracle? The Lord declares, I will abandon you.”

2. (:34) Second Response: The Lord will Punish you
“Then as for the prophet or the priest or the people who say, The oracle of the

Lord, I will bring punishment upon that man and his household.”

3. (:35-36) Third Response: You have Perverted the Truth

“Thus will each of you say to his neighbor and to his brother, What has the Lord answered? Or, What has the Lord spoken? For you will no longer remember the oracle of the Lord, because every man’s own word will become the oracle, and you have perverted the words of the living God, the Lord of hosts, our God.”

4. (:37-38) Fourth Response: Stop Mocking God’s Revelation

“Thus you will say to that prophet, What has the Lord answered you? And what has the Lord spoken? For if you say, The oracle of the Lord! Surely thus says the Lord, Because you said this word, The oracle of the Lord! I have also sent to you, saying, You shall not say, The oracle of the Lord!”

Wiersbe: Their attitude toward God’s message was careless and disrespectful: they weren’t taking seriously God’s message or God’s messenger. The false prophets had distorted the truth to make it mean what they wanted it to mean, and yet they called their messages the “*oracles of God.*”

Dyer: God said He would punish those who claimed any other oracle. The people were misusing the term so much in claiming divine authority for their own words that God told them not to mention the word again. Its misuse had caused the people to distort the true words of the living God. Those who continued to claim divine oracles would be judged. God vowed to cast them out of His presence along with the rest of Jerusalem. These false prophets faced the threat of unending disgrace and shame for their wicked words.

B. (:39-40) Four Promises of Final Condemnation

1. Abandoning You

“Therefore behold, I will surely forget you”

2. Rejecting You

“and cast you away from My presence; along with the city which I gave you and your fathers”

3. Shaming You

“I will put an everlasting reproach on you”

4. Humiliating You

“and an everlasting humiliation which will not be forgotten”

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) In what ways do false teachers today mock the message of those who faithfully proclaim the entire counsel of God?
- 2) How can you recognize injurious and inattentive shepherding?

3) What safeguards (checks and balances) can we maintain to make sure that the source of our teaching originates from God's authority rather than man's imaginations?

4) How can we tell whether the shepherding we are receiving is consistent with the righteousness of God?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Thompson: The condemnation of the false prophets was severe. They were seen as men of low moral standards (**vv. 13-15**), purveyors of a message of peace when judgment was imminent (**vv. 16-17**), men who had not stood in the council of Yahweh (**vv. 18-22**), men who depended on dreams for their message and who borrowed ideas from one another (**vv. 23-32**). Jeremiah stood in striking contrast to the false prophets. He was a man of high moral integrity. He preached judgment. He had stood in the council of Yahweh. He had no recourse to dreams but depended on a direct revelation from Yahweh himself.

Feinberg: Let us not think that Jeremiah took his condemnation of the false prophets lightly. It cost him tremendous emotional and physical stress. He was disturbed and shocked at the enormity of their offenses and was so overcome with the trauma of it that he could only liken himself to a drunken man. He showed no vindictiveness against those who tried to nullify his life's work, only heartbrokenness. Next to the ungodly kings, the false prophets were most responsible for bringing about the nation's ruin. When Jeremiah contrasted their evil ways and words with the holy words of God, it was more than he could contemplate without deep agony of soul.

Constable: Having given a true prophecy about the future, Jeremiah proceeded to announce God's judgment on the false prophets who were misleading His people with false prophecies (cf. **v. 1**). This section consists of six different messages that Jeremiah delivered at various times, which the writer placed together in the text because of their common subject (**vv. 9-12, 13-15, 16-22, 23-24, 25-32, and 33-40**). . .

Dreams were one way that Yahweh communicated His revelations to people in ancient times (cf. **Gen. 28:10-17; 37:5-11; 40; 41:1-45; Num. 12:6-8; 1 Kings 3:5-15; Dan. 2; 4:4-27; 7; Joel 2:28; Zech. 1:7—6:8**). The pagans also viewed dreams as a way the gods communicated with them. Consequently it was possible to claim a revelation in a dream and to obtain an audience. The person who received a revelation from Yahweh in a dream knew it, but it was very difficult for someone else to know if the dream that a prophet claimed really came from Yahweh.

Wiersbe: To begin with, the false prophets offered the people a false hope (**23:16-20**). . . they also ministered under a false authority (**23:21-24**). . . Jehovah wasn't a local deity like the pagan idols, but a transcendent God who reigns above all things and fills heaven and earth (**vv. 23-24**). Nor was He blind like the idols (**Ps. 115:5**), unable to see the sins of the people . . . Finally, the false prophets were speaking under a false inspiration (**vv. 25-32**). They depended on dreams and delusions of the mind, and they even plagiarized messages from one another! Compared to the nourishing wheat of the Word, their messages were only straw; you couldn't eat it, build with it, or even be warmed by it.

Parunak: In our last study, we completed the exposition of the earlier warnings against the royal house. Now we take up the oracles against the false prophets (23:9-40). There are three sections here, each with inner structural cohesion, and each condemning a different sin of the prophets:

a) 9-15, Impurity. Jer. shows that the root of the problem of spiritual adultery lies with the prophets. Instead of being examples of piety to the nation, they are corrupt and impure.

b) 16-32, Deception. Their prophecy is not really from God, and thus it is ineffective to change the people.

“Vanity” literally means “vapor, breath,” and is a common title for idols, representing their insubstantiality, their nothingness. Like the cloud of breath on a cold morning that rapidly disappears, Jer. warns the people that if they follow the prophets, they will become insubstantial, empty, nothings. Their moral fiber will be destroyed.

The rest of the section substantiates this pithy warning in two panels (23:16-22; 23:23-32). Each has the same three sections:

- 1) The prophets’ message is false.
- 2) By contrast, God’s word is true and effective.
- 3) Because God has not authorized their word, it can only harm God’s people.

c) 33-40, Rejection. Not only can they provide no true prophecy, but they mock the real Word of God when it comes from Jeremiah.

Application: Beware these three signs of false teaching: personal immorality; lack of authority and effectiveness; a rejection of the truth.

Peter Wallace: Justice, Truth and a Heart to Know the Lord

Derek Kidner summarized Jeremiah 23 by saying “Without justice, a nation suffers, but without truth it sickens.”

And chapter 24 reminds us that without a heart to know God, a nation is a very bad fig. Have you ever been eating pistachios – or dates – or some other fruit or nut – enjoying a tasty snack – and then you come across one that is spoiled, and the foul, rotten flavor just explodes in your mouth?! What do you do? Well, you look carefully at the next 4 or 5 in order to get the good flavor back!

But the remnant of Jerusalem are like bad figs – so bad that they could not be eaten. That’s right. The remnant. The exiles – those people who were driven out of Jerusalem for their sins – they are like the good figs – the first-ripe fig that my soul desires! But the remnant are spoiled figs that no one can eat.

But God has a habit of turning the world upside-down. This is why (as I look at our topsy-turvy world) I begin to wonder what God might have up his sleeve!

1. Without Justice, a Nation Suffers (23:1-8)

a. Behold, I Will Replace the Shepherds Who Scatter the Sheep (v1-4)

The house of David was called to shepherd the flock of God. But the sons of David did not care for the flock. They scattered the flock and drove them away. And yet God says that he drove

them away. David had been called to succeed where Israel had failed. If you go back to the days of the Judges, the prophet Samuel watched the demise of Israel – when the ark of God was taken captive by the Philistines, and the priests were slaughtered, and Shiloh left vacant. Israel had failed to do justice – to do the truth. Israel did not have a heart to know the LORD. And so God called David and his sons to succeed where Israel had failed. Indeed, the people of Judah had grown proud and short-sighted. They thought that God’s promise meant that Jerusalem would never fall – God’s promises to David would never fail – and therefore they had eternal security.

Eternal security is the doctrine of ‘once-saved-always-saved.’ It is one of those doctrines that is true in one sense, but false in another! It is true in that those who are elect will never finally fall away. It is false in the sense that there are many who are outwardly “saved” who do fall away. I have heard some people say, “My son prayed the prayer when he was seven, so I know he’s okay.” That mentality is exactly the same as Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day. We prayed the prayer, so we’re in! God promised, so we’re good!

Eternal security is only true when it is paired with the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. You are only secure if you persevere. This, in fact, is the fundamental problem for Israel. We don’t persevere. Oh, I don’t doubt that there were some faithful Israelites – and it would appear that a couple of kings may have persevered to the end. But just look at Israel’s history! The people of God never persevere for more than a generation or so. If our eternal security depends on our perseverance, then we’re in trouble. And seriously, that hasn’t changed much. Just look at the history of the church! The security of Israel – the security of the church – does depend on perseverance: and first and foremost, it depends on the perseverance of Jesus! (read v5-6)

b. Behold, I Will Raise Up a Righteous Branch for David Who Will Execute Justice and Righteousness (v5-6)

When there is a Son of David who executes justice and righteousness in the land, then Israel will dwell securely. But so long as the sons of David keep dying, then the “security” is only temporary. Temporary security – temporary salvation – is hardly worth calling salvation at all! We need a Son of David who will never die. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’ There is an irony in this name. The last king of Judah was Zedekiah. Zedekiah’s name means “the LORD my righteousness” We need a Zedekiah. But this guy ain’t it! We need a king whose name is lived out in his life. And the third “behold” focuses on the result of what will happen when we have such a king:

c. Behold, a Day Greater Than the Exodus Is Coming (v7-8)

The exodus was the great redemptive act of God. All of Israel’s history was oriented around the Exodus. The book of Genesis is important – but in the five books of Moses, the book of Genesis functions as a historical preamble to the Mosaic covenant, explaining the background to the Exodus! 4 But when the LORD our righteousness comes – when the righteous branch, the great Son of David, comes – then even the Exodus will pale in comparison with that greater deliverance. Until then – without justice – a nation suffers. Jeremiah then turns to the prophets – pointing out that without truth, a nation sickens.

2. Without Truth, a Nation Sickens (23:9-40)

a. The Prophets of Jerusalem Strengthen the Evildoers (v9-15)

When Jeremiah hears the holy words of the LORD, he becomes like a drunken man – he staggers and reels because of how potent God’s words are. 10 For the land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil,

and their might is not right.

Verses 9-15 lay out the basic charge: the prophets of Jerusalem strengthen the hands of evildoers. Two hundred years before – in the days of Elijah – the prophets of Samaria had led Israel astray. But now it is worse. The prophets of Jerusalem are encouraging people to remain mired in their sin. “All of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.” (v14) You think that Sodom and Gomorrah were bad? Jerusalem is worse! Why? This is the central point of the passage in verses 16-32:

b. Do Not Listen to Prosperity Preachers (v16-32)

i) They Speak Visions of Their Own Minds (v16-17)

I want you to pay attention to this. What is the problem with the “prosperity preachers” in Jeremiah’s day? They are saying to the people of God, “It shall be well with you.” Shalom! They are preaching “if God be for us, who can be against us!” What can separate us from the love of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?! Jeremiah says that they “speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.” But how do you know? False prophets do not wear nametags saying, “Don’t listen to me, I’m a false prophet!” They are simply known as prophets. 6 And in Jeremiah’s day they appear to have been a very orthodox bunch of preachers. When Jeremiah says, “they commit adultery and walk in lies” (v14) that could be referring to their spiritual adultery. But the LORD warns us not to listen to the words of the prosperity preachers. And in verses 18-22 he gives us a clue for how to identify them:

ii) One Who Has Stood in the Council of the LORD Will Warn of His Coming Wrath (v18-22)

A true prophet will warn my people. A true prophet will turn my people from their evil way. Preachers who never rebuke people – but allow them to wallow in their sin – are not sent by God. Verse 23 may sound a little odd:

iii) “I Am Against the Prophets” Declares the LORD (v23-32)

We are so used to hearing the opposite! God often emphasizes how he is not distant – but near! But there is a danger in over-emphasizing the nearness of God! The prosperity preachers keep saying that God is near – God will bless – God’s on your side – he’ll make it all work out! And so the LORD himself points out: “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?”

Don’t think of me as your “pet deity”! This is a serious danger today. If your primary notion of God is that of a close personal friend – a buddy who’s got your back – then verse 23 is what you need to hear! “Am I a God at hand, declares the LORD, and not a God far away?”

24 Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? declares the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? declares the LORD. Yes, God is a God who is near – but he is also far away! He dwells in a high and holy place – but is near to the contrite in heart! Notice that God is near to the humble – to those who recognize that they are small and insignificant. As soon as we think that we are somebody – and that God’s chief end is to make me happy – then we are just creating a god in our own image.

And so God says that he is against the prophets. These prosperity preachers refuse to warn the people of God – and so they “lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness.” Walter Brueggemann summarizes this beautifully: “Behind the dispute concerning true and false

prophets is a dispute about the character of God. The ideological prophets of the establishment celebrated and affirmed God's nearness and God's abiding commitment to and presence within the Jerusalem establishment. God had become a part of that social arrangement. In sharp contrast, Jeremiah bears witness to a God who is 'afar off' – free, sovereign, and not a mere appendage to the established religion... Until Judah is clear about the character of Yahweh, it will never be clear about... what the message will be." (214-215) If you are listening to teachers who are saying that God is there to make you happy, then run away!

c. So Stop Asking for a Message (v33-40)

The word translated "burden" in verses 33-40 has a double meaning. It can mean a "burden" – something you carry. Or it can mean an oracle or message. So when someone comes asking "what is the burden – or message of the LORD" Jeremiah is supposed to answer: "you are the burden – or message of the LORD, and I will cast you off, declares the LORD."

The point of verses 34-40 is that the people, the prophets, and the priests have all become an intolerable weight that God will no longer bear – precisely because they have emphasized their own message (burden) and rejected his.

And the result (v39-40) is that: Jerusalem itself will be cast away from the presence of God. And this sets up the final point. It is not just that the people have been cast out of Jerusalem. Jerusalem itself is under God's wrath.

3. Without a Heart to Know the LORD, a Nation Is a Very Bad Fig (24:1-10)

Without justice, a nation suffers. Without truth, a nation sickens. But without a heart to know the LORD, a nation is a very bad fig! Chapter 24 comes from the time in between Nebuchadnezzar's first and second siege. In 597 he took Jeconiah captive – along with Ezekiel and many leaders of Jerusalem. Many undoubtedly thought that the captives were the "bad figs" – after all, they had been the leaders in Jerusalem. But Jeremiah sees a vision in verses 1-3.

a. The Vision of Two Baskets of Figs (v1-3)

There are two baskets of figs – "placed before the temple of the LORD." Which is which? Well, think about it. Jeremiah has been preaching for years – decades – that God's judgment would come upon Jerusalem, and that the king and the people would be taken into captivity. So is this the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophesy? Undoubtedly some thought that this was all that Jeremiah had prophesied. Soon it would all be over. The king would return – the temple would be restored – and the glory of the kingdom would resume.

But then in verses 4-7, the LORD overturns the expectations of Israel:

b. The Exiles Are the Good Figs – I Will Give Them a Heart to Know Me (v4-7)

The exiles are the good figs. This is unexpected. These people were run out of Jerusalem by God because of their infidelity to God – and yet God says that he will do good to them. All the language of blessing from Jeremiah 1 comes out in God's promise to the exiles.

Notice that the LORD does not say that the exiles are particularly holy. Rather, the emphasis is on what the LORD will do: "I will regard as good... I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down. I will plant them, and not pluck them up. [and above all] I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD. And in the words of the great covenant promise, "and they shall be my people and will be their God,

for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

How can people return to the LORD? Jeremiah has made it clear that our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked. How can we return to the LORD? When God gives us a heart to know the LORD we then return to him. This is an act of grace – sovereign and free – well worth overtaking the Exodus as the greatest event in redemptive history! In contrast:

c. The Remnant Are the Bad Figs – I Will Make Them a Horror (v8-10)

It is simply a matter of God's free election and grace. As Paul says in Romans 9:18, "So then he has mercy on whomever he wills and he hardens whomever he wills." [read and comment on Romans 9:18-29 – especially "We would have been like Sodom and become like Gomorrah"] God makes "the future with those whom the world judges to be without a future."
(Brueggemann, 220)

TEXT: Jeremiah 24:1-10

TITLE: 2 BASKETS OF FIGS -- RIPE AND ROTTEN

BIG IDEA:

THE BASIS FOR SOVEREIGN BLESSING OR CURSING CANNOT BE HUMANLY DISCERNED

INTRODUCTION:

At some point we must bow down before God's sovereignty and acknowledge that God's ways and thoughts are not our ways and thoughts. He acts according to His good pleasure in ways that we cannot comprehend. Why does He choose some vessels to bless and others to curse? While our salvation is conditioned on our repentance and faith – those are not the initiating actions that determine our destiny. Instead God has set in motion before Creation, before we were born, the operation of His grace in the hearts and lives of those whom He chooses to draw to Himself.

THE BASIS FOR SOVEREIGN BLESSING OR CURSING CANNOT BE HUMANLY DISCERNED

I. (:1-3) THE OBJECT LESSON -- TWO BASKETS OF FIGS – RIPE AND ROTTEN

A. (:1a) Context = Post Captivity

“After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon,”

Parunak: The vision takes place just after the deportation of Jeconiah to Babylon, the second of the three great deportations. Those who escaped the second deportation thought of the exiles as under God's curse, and themselves as particularly blessed. This sort of reasoning may have informed Zed's original question in **21**; in spite of all Jer's warnings, he was still hoping for deliverance, because (after all), **he** hadn't been taken away captive. The message is that God's blessing will be on those who are in the second deportation; but those in the third are under his curse.

B. (:1b-2) The Vision

“the LORD showed me: behold, two baskets of figs set before the temple of the LORD! One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten due to rottenness.”

Constable: Jeremiah saw two baskets of figs in the temple courtyard (cf. **Jeremiah 1:11-16; Amos 7:1-9; Amos 8:1-3**). This is where people brought their offerings, so these two baskets may have contained two offerings, perhaps first-fruit offerings. It is impossible to determine if Jeremiah saw this scene in a vision or in actuality. As a message his account of his experience resembles a parable.

C. (:3) The Perception

“Then the LORD said to me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’

And I said, ‘Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad figs, very bad, which cannot be eaten due to rottenness.’”

Parunak: Out of this mass of detail, one feature impresses itself on Jer’s mind: the difference in quality between the two classes of figs. One of the containers was a worthy sacrifice, the finest of the figs. The other was utterly unworthy as an offering to the Lord.

II. (:4-7) THE MEANING --

(:4) *“Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,”*

A. (:5-7) Meaning of the Ripe (Good) Figs

1. (:5) Divine Favor on Jews in Captivity in Babylon

“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans.’”

2. (:6) Physical Restoration

*“For I will set My eyes on them for good,
and I will bring them again to this land;
and I will build them up and not overthrow them,
and I will plant them and not pluck them up.”*

Parunak: Promise to build and plant in the land --

a) Is it fulfilled in the restoration under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah? Note the promises that this restoration will be permanent: “build and not pull down; plant and not pluck up.” Though some of the Jews did return at the end of the captivity, they were scattered again under Rome in 70 and 132 AD. Thus the restoration cannot fulfill this promise.

b) Is it abrogated when the Jews reject the Messiah? But note that this promise is already in spite of their sin, not because of their piety. It is not a conditional reward for merit, but an unconditional gift of grace. In fact, part of the gift (next section) is a heart of submission. If this promise can be abrogated, so can any of God’s promises.

c) Seems best to take this as a promise of a future residence of the Jews in “this land,” the land of Israel.

Thompson: The verbs *build up* (*bana*), *plant* (*nata*), *tear down* (*haras*), and *uproot* (*natas*) are first met in **1:10** and repeatedly mentioned in the book (**cf. 12:14-17; 31:27-28**). They cover the double themes of judgment and restoration, which according to Jeremiah’s call were to be at the heart of his preaching. It was his great grief that the

bulk of his preaching was about judgment. His references to renewal, by comparison, are few.

3. (:7) Spiritual Restoration

a. New Heart

“And I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD;”

b. New Identity

“and they will be My people, and I will be their God,”

c. New Loyalty

“for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”

Constable: This change in the people only occurred partially during the Exile (cf. **Jeremiah 29:4-7; 2 Kings 25:27-30**). We believe that final fulfillment is yet future when Jesus Christ returns (cf. **Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:24-32; Matthew 24:29-31**).

Wiersbe: The people who returned to the land after the Captivity were by no means perfect, but they had learned to trust the true and living God and not to worship idols. If the Captivity did nothing else, it purged the Jewish people of idolatry.

B. (:8-10) Meaning of the Rotten (Bad) Figs

1. (:8) Divine Abandonment on Jewish Leaders and Remnant Remaining in Land or in Egypt

“But like the bad figs which cannot be eaten due to rottenness’ -- indeed, thus says the LORD—‘so I will abandon Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials, and the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and the ones who dwell in the land of Egypt.’”

Feinberg: Jeremiah did not mean that those in exile were intrinsically better than the remnant in Judah but that the purpose of God in his unmerited favor promised them a bright future. . .

A number of scholars suggest that those living in Egypt were Jews who were deported with Jehoahaz to Egypt by Pharaoh Neco (cf. **2 Kings 23:31-34**). Others suggest that they were emigrants who were opposed to the Babylonian domination of Judah or fled to Egypt at the first approach of Nebuchadnezzar. Another proposal is that they were fugitives from Judah who went to Egypt during various wars.

2. (:9) Divine Curse

“And I will make them a terror and an evil for all the kingdoms of the earth, as a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse in all places where I shall scatter them.”

Dyer: Several times in the Book of Jer. the prophet predicted that the people would be

cursed, ridiculed, and/or reproached and that others would be horrified at their desolate condition: cf. 25:9, 18; 26:6; 29:18; 42:18; 44:8, 12, 22. Also note 48:39; 49:13, 17; 51:37, about other countries.

3. (:10) Divine Destruction

“And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence upon them until they are destroyed from the land which I gave to them and their forefathers.”

Kidner: The natural reaction to the fate of the captives deported in 597, and to the good fortune of those who were left behind, was to see the former as God’s throw-outs, the bad figs; and to see the rest as his men of promise, the good figs that were worth keeping. But, as ever, God’s thoughts and plans were not at all what men imagined.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Which group of individuals (those deported or those remaining in Jerusalem) would have had the natural expectation that they were recipients of God’s favor?
- 2) What is the ultimate determining factor in whether or not somebody receives a new heart and becomes united with God as the people of God?
- 3) How do these verses support an eventual physical restoration of national Israel to a place of blessing and prominence in the Promised Land?
- 4) Why does this object lesson present itself in the context of the temple in Jerusalem?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

John Piper: Sometimes readers of the Bible see the conditions that God lays down for his blessing and they conclude from these conditions that *our* action is first and decisive, then God responds to bless us.

That is not right.

There are indeed real conditions that God often commands. We must meet them for the promised blessing to come. But that does not mean that we are left to ourselves to meet the conditions or that *our* action is first and decisive.

Here is one example to show what I mean.

In **Jeremiah 29:13** God says to the exiles in Babylon, “*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*” So there is a condition: When you seek me with all your heart, then you will find me. So we must seek the Lord. That is the condition of finding him.

True.

But does that mean that we are left to ourselves to seek the Lord? Does it mean that our action of seeking him is first and decisive? Does it mean that God only acts *after* our seeking?

No.

Listen to what God says in **Jeremiah 24:7** to those same exiles in Babylon: “*I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.*”

So the people will meet the condition of returning to God with their whole heart. God will respond by being their God in the fullest blessing. But the reason they returned with their whole heart is that God gave them a heart to know him. His action was first and decisive.

So now connect that with **Jeremiah 29:13**. The condition there was that they seek the Lord with their whole heart. Then God will be found by them. But now we see that the promise in **Jeremiah 24:7** is that God himself will give them such a heart so that they will return to him with their whole heart.

This is one of the most basic things people need to see about the Bible. It is full of conditions we must meet for God’s blessings. But God does not leave us to meet them on our own. The first and decisive work before and in our willing is God’s prior grace. Without this insight, hundreds of conditional statements in the Bible will lead us astray.

Let this be the key to all Biblical conditions and commands: “*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.*” (**Philippians 2:12-13**). Yes, we work. But our work is not first or decisive. God’s is. “*I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me*” (**1 Corinthians 15:10**).

Gino Geraci: The lesson includes the idea of the hope contained for those who are disciplined by God and the tragic punishment for the wicked.

Discipline may bring momentary pain or hardship. But discipline brings with it hope and peace. God will use the Babylonian captivity to bring about a purging and peace and hope. God will use it for good. Even when discipline comes God promises to watch over and protect his people; and to make them secure and use the discipline as an opportunity to change hearts. . .

Offerings to God usually fall into two broad categories: acceptable and unacceptable. . .

God promised that he would use the captivity to work in the hearts of the people. The pain, the suffering, the uprooting, the loss of all things was to cause them to seek the Lord, to cry out to God. In crying out to God, they would repent of their sin and turn back to the Lord. In surrendering wholeheartedly to the Lord; they would renew their relationship with God and take the necessary steps to know Him. The suffering and hardship, the trial and the captivity would cause them to turn to God, and worship God, and surrender to God and serve God!

Russ Kennedy: See how God regards them! Here is the surprise: those who have been taken into captivity are the good figs. They have been sent away by God to preserve them. God regards them with delight. They are the ones who, like good figs, bring joy and delight to the Lord of the harvest. He has sent them into exile, not to judge them, but rather to preserve them as His own. In God's sovereign ordination of their lives at this moment, He has chosen to send the best of His harvest to lie in captivity.

Daryl Hilbert: **THE GOOD AND THE BAD FIGS** - 08/29/18 - Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

I. VISION OF FIGS (Jer 24:1-3)

A. Context

1. The period was during the reign of Zedekiah in 597 BC. He was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) was taken into exile (2Ki 24:17).
2. This was Judah's second wave of deportation to Babylon and included Ezekiel the prophet.
3. Some have objected to this chapter because the idea of good figs among bad figs does not appear to fit with Jeremiah's attitude that all of Jerusalem was considered wicked (Jer 4:14).
4. However, this chapter does not view some in Judah as morally "good." Rather, there were some who were "good" in the sense of being useful to Nebuchadnezzar. Therefore, there will be some from Judah who will receive "good" in the sense of receiving better than they deserved.

B. Time After Jeconiah's Captivity (1)

1. Jeremiah identified the time of the vision. It was some time after Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) was taken into captivity.
2. Jeremiah's vision included two baskets of figs which were set before the Temple of the Lord.
3. King Nebuchadnezzar had taken all the best skilled craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem (2Ki 24:14-16 cf. Isa 41:7 cf. 1Ki 6:20). He took them back to be useful for him in Babylon.
4. The metals used in ancient Palestine included gold, silver, copper, lead, tin, and iron; practically all are mentioned in Jeremiah either literally or figuratively. (Philip King, Jeremiah, An Archaeological Companion, pg.179)

C. Vision of the Good and Bad Figs (2-3)

1. One of the baskets contained good figs, that is, those which came from the first harvest.
 - a. Figs in Israel are harvested two times a year. The first harvest ripens in June (Isa 28:4; Hos 9:10).
 - b. The first-ripe figs are especially juicy and considered a delicacy.
2. The other basket was full of bad figs which were rotten and could not be eaten.
3. Jeremiah was questioned by the Lord as to what he observed in the vision (cf. Jer 1:11, 13). Jeremiah observed that the good figs were of the best quality and the bad figs were so rotten they could not be eaten.
4. General facts about figs
 - a. Growing to nearly 20 feet in height and with large leaves, the fig tree provides pleasant shade. Minute wasps cultivate these trees, and the fig is produced before the leaves emerge. The flower of the tree is never seen, as its many tiny flowers are housed within the fruit bud. Two crops are produced each year. The first crop is eaten fresh, while the second crop is dried for winter...[T]he fig tree was extremely important for both nutritional and economic reasons in ancient times (BiblePlaces.com).
 - b. Figs correspond to *netzach* (endurance), which engenders longevity. The fig tree reflects everlasting fruitfulness as it has one of the longest periods of ripening, spanning more than three months... Maimonides [Jewish philosopher and physician] taught that figs alleviate constipation, which is one of the main tenets of longevity and health. Figs may benefit the elderly by strengthening the blood and arousing vitality (Siegelbaun, *The Seven Species*).
 - c. Modern science affirms the nutritional benefits of figs: they are very rich in minerals, especially potassium, iron, and calcium, and they contain omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Figs also contain phytosterols, which inhibit the absorption of dietary cholesterol, thus decreasing the total levels of cholesterol. Moreover, they may help prevent certain types of cancers (Siegelbaun, *The Seven Species*).
5. References to figs in the Bible
 - a. Figs are the first fruit to be mentioned in the Scriptures. After sinning, Adam and Eve sewed "fig leaves" as loin coverings (Gen 3:7).
 - b. Figs were included among the seven foods which the Lord would give Israel in the promised land (Deu 8:8). 2
 - c. Figs were sometimes made into fig cakes and were given to revitalize the body (1Sa 30:12).
 - d. Fig trees can be a sign of blessing from the Lord through peaceful comfort as in the shade from the leaves. They can also be a sign of prosperity when everyone has his own fig tree (1Ki 4:25).
 - e. On the other hand, figs can represent the judgment of the Lord as in the destroying of fig trees (Jer 5:17; Jer 24:8).
 - f. Jesus cursed the unfruitful fig tree (Mar 11:12-14).

g. Stars will fall from the heavens like unripe figs shaken by the wind (Rev 6:13).

II. VISION OF GOOD FIGS EXPLAINED (Jer 24:4-7)

A. Explanation of the Vision (4-5)

1. Again, we have the phrase, “the word of the LORD came” to Jeremiah (4). This is a revelatory vision that is given to the prophet and is passed on to God’s people without error.
2. The Lord explained the meaning of the vision to Jeremiah (5).
 - a. The captives of Judah that went in the second wave of deportation (Jeconiah, king of Judah 597 BC) would be like the good figs.
 - b. Not because they were morally good, but because they were good in the sense of being useful to Nebuchadnezzar.

B. Lord will set His eyes for good (6)

1. Even though Jeconiah’s group was taken captive, they will be part of the Lord’s remnant for good.
2. They would see good, not because of their piety and godliness, but because of the Lord’s favor (grace).
3. The Lord would bring them again into the promised land (Jer 29:4-7).
4. The Lord would build them up in Babylon and return them to Jerusalem (Ezr 1:3).

C. Lord will give them a heart (7)

1. In addition to reinstatement and the rebuilding of the Temple, the Lord would spiritually revitalize them.
2. The Lord would give them a heart to know Him.
3. The Lord would take them back as His people and the Lord would be their God.
4. They would return whole-heartedly to the Lord and ultimately fulfilled in Jer 31:31-34.

III. VISION OF BAD FIGS EXPLAINED (Jer 24:8-10)

A. Zedekiah Will be Abandoned (8)

1. The bad figs would be King Zedekiah, who did evil in the sight of the Lord (2Ki 24:17-20).
2. The bad figs would include those who were left in Jerusalem until the third wave of deportation in 586 BC.
3. They should have repented knowing that the word of the prophet Jeremiah had partially come true during the second wave of deportation.
4. They may have thought they were blessed by the Lord because they were not in captivity. However, they were rotten spiritually and bad circumstances would come upon them more than those who were deported in the second wave.
5. King Zedekiah, his officials, and the people would be abandoned and receive the full brunt of judgment.

B. Zedekiah Will be a Reproach (9)

1. Instead of being God's remnant for good, they would be a remnant for bad.
2. Those in the third wave of deportation would become a reproach and a proverb.
3. They will be remembered as the ones who did not return to the Lord and were taken into captivity.

C. Sword and Famine Will be Sent (10)

1. Not only would they be taken into captivity, but many would be killed by the swords of the Babylonians.
2. If the sword did not get them, famine and pestilence would.
3. They would be destroyed from ever returning to the promised land. Zedekiah himself will die in blindness, shame, without a throne, and in exile (Jer 34:4; 2Ki 25:6-7; Eze12:13).

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. God's remnants of glory and wrath (Rom 9:22-23)

1. All deserve the wrath of God (Rom 3:23; 6:23).
2. Yet, there will be some vessels by God's grace prepared for glory (Rom 9:23). 3
3. While at the same time, there will be some vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (Rom 9:22).

B. Lord Works All Things for Good (Rom 8:28)

1. The Lord works all things ultimately for His glory.
2. The Lord also works all things together for the good of those who have trusted in Christ. They are the ones who love God and are called according to His purpose.
3. However, the Lord does not work all things for good for those who reject Him.

C. Useful as a Fig Tree

1. In Mat 21:18-19, Jesus cursed a fig tree that did not produce fruit.
2. Immediately...is a relative term; the tree may have died at once, but Mark 11:14, 20 (see note there) suggested that the withering was not visible until the following day. Jesus' cursing of the tree was a purposeful divine object lesson, not an impetuous act of frustration. The fig tree is often employed in Scripture as a symbol of Israel (Hos. 9:10; Joel 1:7)—and the barren fig tree often symbolizes divine judgment on Israel because of her spiritual fruitlessness (see note on 3:8) despite an abundance of spiritual advantages (Jer. 8:13; Joel 1:12). Jesus' act therefore illustrates God's judgment against earthly Israel for shameful fruitlessness, exemplified in the rejection of their Messiah. One of Christ's parables taught a similar lesson (Luke 13:6-9) (MSB in Mat 21:19).
3. Through Zechariah the Lord promised His people that at Messiah's second coming, He would "remove the iniquity of that land in one day" and "every one of you will invite his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree" (Zech.

3:9–10). A favorite place for people to gather was under a fig tree (MacArthur).
4. Believers can produce fruit through the Lord but cannot produce fruit without the Lord (Joh 15:1-5).

TEXT: Jeremiah 25:1-38

TITLE: PROGRESSION OF JUDGMENT

BIG IDEA:

JUDGMENT BEGINS WITH THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD AND PROGRESSES AGAINST ALL NATIONS FOR THEIR STUBBORN REBELLION

INTRODUCTION:

Mankind has a built-in capacity for sin defined as Total Depravity. That is just how we are wired. We sin because innately we are sinners. Interestingly, mankind also has the common tendency to think that somehow judgment for sin will skip over us. We can see the severe demonstration of God's judgment around us, but still come to the false conclusion that accountability does not apply in our case.

So the nation of Judah, despite having seen the demise of the Northern Kingdom at the hands of Assyria, despite being warned over many years and from the mouths of many prophets about the impending judgment from God, still holds out the false illusion that she is untouchable. So with the pagan nations. Babylon will end up being used as an instrument of God's judgment on His own people while maintaining that their own ruthless wicked practices will not bring them down.

In similar fashion, the other surrounding nations imagine that they are invincible – until it is too late. Here we see the progression of God's inevitable judgment – starting with the household of God, but then branching out and encompassing Babylon and the surrounding nations as well. God will execute His justice and hold His creation accountable despite their sense of false security.

Parunak: Ch. 25 ends the first oracle section of Jer. (Biography in ch. 1, oracles in 2-25, biography in 26-29) . . . these oracles have been dedicated to judgment, and ch. 25 is a grand finale on the theme of judgment.

JUDGMENT BEGINS WITH THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD AND PROGRESSES AGAINST ALL NATIONS FOR THEIR STUBBORN REBELLION

I. (:1-7) BLAME ASSIGNED -- JUDAH INDICTED FOR FAILURE TO LISTEN AND RESPOND TO THE WARNINGS OF THE LORD

(:1-2) Introduction

“The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying,”

Mackay: The fact that the events of **chapter 25** took place several years before those recorded in **chapter 24** again reminds us that at this point the material has been gathered thematically rather than chronologically. . .

The dual dating is employed to emphasise that from this point onwards the real power in the land is Nebuchadnezzar (cf. **32:1**, the only other text in the book to employ dual dating). Jeremiah is speaking against a background when the power of Babylon has already impinged upon the small kingdom of Judah. Jehoiakim is no longer free to do as he pleases in Judah, and the long-threatened judgment of the Lord has begun to be implemented.

Feinberg: This prophecy is precisely dated to show its extraordinary significance. . . Archaeology has shown that there were two methods of chronological reckoning in the Near East – by accession year and by nonaccession year. Judah used the first method; Babylon, the second.

Jeremiah at the mid-point of his prophetic career

A. (:3-4) Communicators of the Message – Sent from the Lord

1. (:3) Jeremiah

“From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.”

Authority of the Lord behind the message

Plenty of repetition and consistency in the message

2. (:4) Other Prophets

“And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear,”

Jeremiah was not a lone voice; not an outlier; message was consistent from all these prophets

Parunak: Note the time periods involved. 23 years for Jer; the others are “*all his servants the prophets,*” which takes us back to Samuel 500 years earlier, and ultimately to Moses 800 years before. This message is not new. No one can claim they haven’t had time to hear it.

Mackay: The prophets referred to here might be those that were contemporary with Jeremiah such as Uriah, Zephaniah and Habakkuk, but more probably this is the line of prophetic ministry stretching back to much earlier times, by which the Lord sought to recall his errant subjects, and which received in general the same response, or rather non-response (**7:25-26; 11:7; 26:4-5; 32:33; 35:14-15; 44:4-5**).

B. (:5-6) Content of the Message – Repent / Remain Loyal to the God of the Covenant / Reject Idolatry

1. (:5a) Repent

“saying, ‘Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds,”

Mackay: Their “ways” (18:11) refers to their lifestyle in general, whereas “practices” refers to more specific actions that arise from the prevailing consensus (4:18).

2. (:5b) Remain Loyal to the God of the Covenant

“and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever;”

What have these false idols given to them?

3. (:6) Reject Idolatry

“and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.”

C. (:7) Cavalier Rejection of the Message

“‘Yet you have not listened to Me,’ declares the LORD, ‘in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.’”

Cavalier: Showing arrogant or offhand disregard; dismissive:

II. (:8-14) BOOMERANG EFFECT -- JUDGMENTS OF THE LORD INVOLVING NEBUCHADNEZZAR

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts,”

A. (:8-11) Nebuchadnezzar Commissioned to Devastate Judah

1. (:8) Judgment Due to Rebellion

“Because you have not obeyed My words,”

2. (:9a) Judgment Delegated to Nebuchadnezzar

“‘behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations round about;”

3. (:9b) Judgment Depicted as Devastating and Humiliating

“and I will utterly destroy them, and make them a horror, and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.”

4. (:10) Judgment Designed to Remove All Joy

*“Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness,
the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride,
the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.”*

Longman: the grinding of grain to produce food to enjoy

Thompson: all mark the close of life (cf. **Eccl. 12:3-6** for similar examples pointing to the approach of death)

Mackay: A bleak and grim silence descends on the land under divine judgment.

5. (:11) Judgment Detailed as Seventy Years of Desolation and Subjugation

a. Desolation

“And this whole land shall be a desolation and a horror,”

b. Subjugation

“and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.”

MacArthur: Here is the first specific statement on the length of the exile (cf. **29:10**). This period probably began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Jerusalem was first captured and the temple treasures were taken. It ends with the decree of Cyrus to let the Jews return, spanning from ca. 605/04 B.C. to 536/35 B.C. The exact number of Sabbath years is 490 years, the period from Saul to the Babylonian captivity. This was retribution for their violation of the Sabbath law (cf. **Lv 26:34,35; 2Ch 36:21**).

B. (:12-14) Nebuchadnezzar Condemned to Similar Divine Judgments

1. (:12) Punishment Reversed

“Then it will be when seventy years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the LORD, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.”

Boomerang nature of this judgment = a reversal of how Babylon had been devastating Judah for her sins

Longman: This is exactly what happened to the political entity called Babylon. In 539 B.C., the native Babylonian dynasty led by Nabonidus and his son and co-regent Belsharusur (the latter mentioned in the Bible under the name Belshazzar [see **Dan. 5**]) were defeated by the Persians under Cyrus the great.

2. (:13) Prophecies Fulfilled

“And I will bring upon that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations.”

MacArthur: Jeremiah prophesied judgments on surrounding nations (cf. **chaps. 46-49**), while Babylon is the focus of judgment in **chaps. 50-51**.

3. (:14) Payback Rendered

“(For many nations and great kings shall make slaves of them, even them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their hands.)”

Wiersbe: because of the ruthless way they treated both Jews and Gentiles (**25:12-14**). It was one thing for Nebuchadnezzar to do God’s work, but when his attitude became proud and hateful, he overstepped his bounds.

III. (:15-29) BAR SCENE – JEREMIAH SERVING UP THE CUP OF GOD’S WRATH TO THE NATIONS

“For thus the LORD, the God of Israel, says to me,”

Thompson: It is at once evident that **vv. 15-39** are closely related to the oracles against the foreign nations in **chs. 46-51**. . . All the nations referred to in **chs. 46-51** are included here except Damascus, but other nations are referred to besides those mentioned in the oracles there.

A. (:15-16) Summary Instruction

1. (:15) Distribution of the Cup of Divine Wrath

“Take this cup of the wine of wrath from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it.”

2. (:16) Drunkenness Described

“And they shall drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them.”

B. (:17-26) Specific Imbibings

1. (:17) All the Nations

*“Then I took the cup from the LORD’s hand, and made **all the nations** drink, to whom the LORD sent me:”*

2. (:18) Judah

“Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and its kings and its princes, to make them a ruin, a horror, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day;”

3. (:19) Egypt

“Pharaoh king of Egypt, his servants, his princes, and all his people;”

4. (:20) Philistines

*“and all the foreign people,
all the kings of the land of Uz,
all the kings of the land of the Philistines even Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron,
and the remnant of Ashdod;”*

land of Uz was home of Job (**Job 1:1**)

Longman: The Philistines refer to the people who live in the coastal areas and low foothills of the Shephelah in an area to the southwest of Jerusalem.

Mackay: There is no mention of the fifth member of the Philistine pentapolis, Gath, which seems to have been destroyed by this date. It is similarly omitted in **Amos 1:7**; **Zeph. 2:4**; **2 Chron. 26:6**, probably having been overthrown by Hazael (**2 Kgs. 12:17**).

5. (:21) Nations east of Judah: Edom, Moab, Ammon

“Edom, Moab and the sons of Ammon;”

6. (:22) Phoenician seacoast towns: Tyre and Sidon

*“and all the kings of Tyre,
all the kings of Sidon
and the kings of the coastlands which are beyond the sea;”*

7. (:23) Arabian Peninsula: Dedan, Tema, Buz

“and Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who cut the corners of their hair;”

Thompson: The expression “*the cutting of the fringe*” is ambiguous. Some translations take it as “*those who cut the corners of their hair*,” a reference to a tribal custom among some desert Arabs. The alternative and perhaps more convincing translation is “*those who roam the fringe of the desert*” (NEB; cf. **49:32**), referring to nomadic or seminomadic tribes or clans who lived on the desert fringes.

8. (:24) Arabia

*“and all the kings of Arabia
and all the kings of the foreign people who dwell in the desert;”*

9. (:25) Far East: Zimri, Elam, Media

*“and all the kings of Zimri,
all the kings of Elam
and all the kings of Media;”*

10. (:26) Summary

*“and all the kings of the north, near and far, one with another;
and all the kingdoms of the earth which are upon the face of the ground,
and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them.”*

Mackay: Sheshach is a cryptic reference to Babylon (**51:41**; cf. also **51:1**). The device is known as *athbash*, an elementary code which wrote the consonants of a Hebrew word by reversing the letters of the alphabet (the first letter *aleph* for the last letter *tau* and vice-versa) . . .

C. (:27-29) Severe and Certain Impact

1. (:27) Severe Impact -- Experience the Full Impact of God's Wrath

"You shall say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you.'"

2. (:28-29) Certain Impact -- No Escape from God's Wrath

"And it will be, if they refuse to take the cup from your hand to drink, then you will say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: You shall surely drink! For behold, I am beginning to work calamity in this city which is called by My name, and shall you be completely free from punishment? You will not be free from punishment; for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth, declares the Lord of hosts.'"

Kidner: Principle that judgment must "begin with the household of God": cf. **1 Peter 4:17; Amos 3:2**.

Mackay: The nations who are not in covenant relationship with the Lord have no reason to think that they are immune from judgment because of their sin.

IV. (:30-38) BLAST FROM THE LORD

"Therefore you shall prophesy against them all these words, and you shall say to them,"

A. (:30-31) Mighty Roar of the Lord

*"He will roar mightily against His fold.
He will shout like those who tread the grapes,
Against all the inhabitants of the earth.*

*A clamor has come to the end of the earth,
Because the Lord has a controversy with the nations.
He is entering into judgment with all flesh;*

As for the wicked, He has given them to the sword,' declares the Lord."

*The Lord will roar from on high
And utter His voice from His holy habitation;"*

B. (:32-33) Mighty Storm from the Lord

*“Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Behold, evil is going forth from nation to nation,
And a great storm is being stirred up from the remotest parts of the earth.
Those slain by the Lord on that day will be from one end of the earth to
the other.
They will not be lamented, gathered or buried;
they will be like dung on the face of the ground.’”*

Mackay: “At that time” / “on that day” (in contrast to “this day” in v. 18) gives the passage eschatological overtones. The impending scene will presage the final judgment of God. Previous descriptions of the slain had focused on the environs of Jerusalem (7:32-33; 19:11), but now the impact of the judgment is evident on all sides. There will be so many slaughtered on that day that it will be impossible to carry out the traditional mourning rites, and the corpses will be left untended where they have fallen (8:2; 9:22; 12:2; 16:4).

C. (:34-38) Slaughter of the Shepherds and Scattering of the Sheep

*“Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow in ashes, you masters of the flock;
For the days of your slaughter and your dispersions have come,
And you will fall like a choice vessel.
Flight will perish from the shepherds, and escape from the masters of the flock.
Hear the sound of the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the masters of the flock!
For the Lord is destroying their pasture, And the peaceful folds are made silent
Because of the fierce anger of the Lord.
He has left His hiding place like the lion;
For their land has become a horror
Because of the fierceness of the oppressing sword
And because of His fierce anger.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Noting that Nebuchadnezzar is identified here as “*God’s servant*” even though he was not consciously submitting to God’s will teaches us what about God’s sovereignty and the accomplishment of His kingdom agenda?
- 2) Are there any ways we are *provoking the Lord to anger*?
- 3) What detracts from us listening to the voice of the Lord and inclining our ear to respond in obedience?
- 4) How awful is the *cup of God’s wrath*?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Wiersbe: vv. 15-38 - In this message, Jeremiah used eight vivid images to describe the judgment God was sending to the Gentiles:

- 1) the cup of wrath (vv.15-29)
- 2) the roaring lion (vv. 30a, 38)
- 3) the winepress (v. 30b)
- 4) the lawsuit (v. 31)
- 5) the storm (vv. 32-33)
- 6) the refuse (v. 33)
- 7) the broken pottery (v. 34)
- 8) the slaughtered flock (vv. 34-38)

David Durant: Judgment Begins with the House of Israel

A topic that is difficult for many people – the certain wrath of God against sinners. They cannot understand how God’s wrath can be just and good – seems primitive to them. But the real reason they struggle is that they really do not have God in view. They only have themselves in view. They have not received and owned the idea that God created them and they owe him their loving obedience and humble worship. They do not know how the execution of God’s wrath is the execution of His justice.

We want justice for ourselves. Why don’t we long for justice for God? Appropriate punishment must be meted out for every crime committed against Him. God has revealed what punishment is appropriate for sin = death = separation from God; because God is holy.

This passage is about the execution of God’s justice. There are certain principles at work that guide God in His execution of justice; He has a certain way of doing things that reveal what is true about God.

God begins about how for so many years He has been reminding them of their need to repent and turn back to Him in obedience. They have not obeyed His Word. God will send Nebuchadnezzar against them. God also promises that after 70 years He will punish Babylon. **Vv. 15-29** describe a vision of the cup of the wine of God’s wrath. The first ones to drink are Jerusalem and the cities of Judah and then the other kingdoms of the earth. There is a progression. Judgment culminates with judgment against Babylon – in the end times, Satan = the great Babylon.

Believers are disciplined as an act of God’s love, not His wrath. God’s discipline is intended for our sanctification that we might live more holy lives and walk in fellowship with Him. We will not be condemned along with the world. But in some situations that discipline can even result in death – for the sake of our souls, for the sake of the church, for the sake of the testimony of the Lord Jesus. God loves us too much to allow sin to destroy us.

There are other things that can bring suffering into our lives: persecution; test of our faith; to teach us greater depths of obedience (**Heb. 5:8**); etc. But suffering can be the expression of God's loving discipline.

If He does this to His own people, what will He do in terms of judging His enemies in wrath. The law requires justice. The execution of that justice begins with those closest to God. This is the way God works. His justice fell on the one closest to Him – our representative – the Lord Jesus – even though He had never sinned.

Daryl Hilbert: CUP OF GOD'S WRATH UPON ALL NATIONS Grace Bible Church, Gillette, Wyoming

I. CONTEXT OF CHAPTER 25

A. This chapter deals with a time of national and international ramifications. In 605 B.C. (some say 606), the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish, thus bringing to an end the domination of Palestine by Pharaoh Neco of Egypt. Carchemish was one of the decisive battles of the world because it affected the course of history in western Asia. Through it Jeremiah was enabled by the Lord to see the working out of the divine purposes of judgment on Judah by means of Babylon.

B. Battle of Carchemish Carchemish is mentioned in the western campaigns of several Assyrian kings. In 717 BC, Sargon II made Carchemish an Assyrian province and appointed a governor. After the fall of Nineveh, the Assyrian kings removed to Haran, and then to Carchemish. In 605 BC, Pharaoh Necho II and the Egyptian army came to Assyria's aid and faced Nebuchadnezzar II in battle at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2). [Four years earlier]...in a pro-Babylonian move, King Josiah attempted to prevent the Egyptian advance at Megiddo [Battle at Megiddo], but he was fatally wounded (2 Chr. 35:20-25) (Bible Places).

II. TIME FRAME OF THE PROPHECY (1-3)

A. In the previous chapters, Jeremiah was speaking of the time of King Zedekiah. Jeremiah gave the time frame for the forthcoming prophecy. Chapter 25 takes place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 BC).

B. Jeremiah also recorded that Nebuchadnezzar II began his first year as king of Babylon in the same year. Two major events took place in Nebuchadnezzar's first year in power. The first was the battle of Carchemish. The second was Nebuchadnezzar's first wave of the deportation of Judah (1).

C. Jeremiah calculated the years beginning at King Josiah's thirteenth year as king (628 BC). King Josiah reigned for a total of 31 years that ended in 609 BC. Adding Jehoiakim's four years as king, the total time that passed since Josiah's thirteenth year was twenty-three years (3a).

D. Jeremiah's prophecy was to all of the inhabitants of Judah and to Jerusalem (2).

III. BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY PROPHESED (3b-10)

A. Did not Listen to the Lord (3b-4)

1. Jeremiah told all of Judah that though God had spoken to them time after time they would not listen.
2. God had repeatedly spoken to them through His prophets, who are also His servants, concerning judgment (2Ki 17:13; Jer 7:25).

B. Must Turn from Evil Ways (5)

1. Even though judgment had been forecasted against them, God was offering them a chance to repent.
2. They were to turn to the Lord away from there disobedient ways and deeds. If they would have, they would have remained in the Promised Land.

C. Must Not Go After Other Gods (6)

1. God was also asking them to repent from their idolatry. They continually went after other gods.
2. If they would have repented, then God would not have been provoked to anger to bring judgment against them (do you no harm).

D. Provoked the Lord (7)

1. Nevertheless, they would not repent or listen to the Lord.
2. Therefore, because the Lord was provoked to anger, He brought down judgment upon them.

E. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar Was Sent (8-9a)

1. Since they chose not to obey the Lord's words, God was going to bring judgment.
2. Judgment would come in the form of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The "families of the north" would be the allies that submitted to his power after the battle of Carchemish.
3. The Lord called King Nebuchadnezzar, "My servant," not because he was godly but because he was an instrument of the Lord through whom He would carry out His judgment.

F. Desolation and Removal of Joy (9b-10)

1. Not only would Judah be judged, but all the nations would eventually be judged. 2
2. Even though Judah would experience its first wave of deportation shortly, they all would eventually be taken into captivity and Jerusalem would be utterly destroyed. The same would happen to the other nations (9b).
3. With this destruction and judgment comes the removal of joy and gladness. All normal activity including normal celebrations of marriage would cease while in captivity (10).

IV. SEVENTY YEARS IN CAPTIVITY (11-14)

A. Seventy Years in Captivity (11)

1. The nations will be under Babylonian rule for seventy years because the Babylonian rule will last seventy years. The end of the Babylonian rule will allow for the release of Judah from captivity.
2. This is the first time Jeremiah mentioned the length of the captivity. Elsewhere Jeremiah talks about seventy years as the duration of the Babylonian Captivity (Jer 29:10).
3. Defenders of the precise period of seventy years offer a choice between 605 B.C. (or 606) and 536 B.C., when resettlement took place under Zerubbabel and Joshua; or 586 B.C., the beginning of the Babylonian captivity, and 516 B.C., the year of the completion of Zerubbabel's temple (so Archer et al.). Of the two options for the precise-dating view, the former appears more tenable in view of the period of the three deportations, dating from Jehoiakim's reign to Jehoiachin's to Zedekiah's. (EXP).
4. This period probably began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, when Jerusalem was first captured and the temple treasures were taken. It ends with the decree of Cyrus to let the Jews return, spanning from ca. 605/04 B.C. to 536/35 B.C. The exact number of Sabbath years is 490 years, the period from Saul to the Babylonian captivity. This was retribution for their violation of the Sabbath law (cf. Lev. 26:34, 35; 2 Chr. 36:21] (MSB).

B. Babylonian Punishment After Seventy Years (12-14)

1. After seventy years, the Lord will punish Babylon. This will take place during the reign of Cyrus the Great of Persia in 536 BC. Because of the iniquities of the Babylonian rule they will come to everlasting desolation (12).
2. The Lord will not only fulfill His prophecies concerning Judah, but He will also fulfill His prophecies of judgment against the nations (13).
3. [Babylon's] rule was terminated by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus [c. 536–535 B.C.]. (EXP).
4. As Babylon made slaves out of the nations, including Judah, the Lord will bring the Babylonians into servitude (14).

V. PUNISHMENT OF ALL NATIONS (15-26)

A. Cup of Wrath to All the Nations (15)

1. This prophecy has in view the destruction that Nebuchadnezzar will bring to the nations at Carchemish and Judah.
2. This vision or figure of speech portrayed Jeremiah prophesying the judgment of God's cup of wrath to the nations.
3. The cup of wine of wrath is a common expression of judgment as it is used here (Jer 49:12; 51:7; Job 21:20; Psa 60:3; Isa 51:17, 22; Eze 23:31; Mar 10:39; 14:36; Joh 18:11). Sometimes the cup symbolizes blessing (Psa 16:5; Luk 22:17; 1Co 10:16).

B. Nations Made to Drink the Cup (16-17)

1. When the nations drink the Lord's cup, that is, the sword that [the Lord] will

- send, they will become delirious and insane with fear and chaos.
2. The Lord's judgment will be the sword in the hand and rule of Nebuchadnezzar.
 3. The nations are named in vss. 18-26.

VI. NAMING OF THE NATIONS

- A. Kings of Jerusalem (18)
- B. King of Egypt (19)
- C. Kings of Uz, Kings of Philistine land (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron and the remnant of Ashdod) (20)
- D. Kings of Edom, Moab and the sons of Ammon (21)
- E. Kings of Tyre and Sidon (22)
- F. Kings of Dedan, Tema, Buz (23)
- G. Kings of Arabia (24)
- H. Kings of Zimri, Elam and Media (25)
- I. Kings of the north, Sheshach (26)

VII. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

- A. Twenty-Three Years in Jeremiah's Eyes
 1. How difficult it was for Jeremiah, through no fault of his own, to watch the spiritual decline of Judah. Similar to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, spiritual decline is the norm among man.
 2. Sad indeed it must have been for Jeremiah to look back on twenty-three years of faithful, earnest ministry for the Lord and then to have to pronounce it a failure as far as Judah was concerned (v.3). (EXP)

- B. The Cup of God's Wrath
 1. The cup of God's wrath will come again as depicted in the book of Revelation.
 2. Similar to Jeremiah's warning, the apostle John has warned the world of the coming cup of God's wrath (Rev 14:8, 10; 16:19; 18:6).

Peter Wallace: Seventy Years of the Cup of Wrath

1. Seventy Years of Desolation: the Result of Persistent Disobedience (25:1-14)

a. You Have Not Listened to My Servants the Prophets (v1-7)

The fourth year of Jehoiakim – which is also the first year of Nebuchadnezzar – is known in our history books as the year 605 B.C. 605 BC was a very important year in the ancient world! 605 BC was the year of the battle of Carchemish – where Nebuchadnezzar, the crown prince of Babylon, defeated the combined armies of Assyria and Egypt in order to establish Babylon as the greatest power in the Middle East. Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, had led a Babylonian uprising against the Assyrian Empire. In 612 B.C., Nabopolassar had defeated Nineveh – so the Assyrians moved their capital to Harran. In 610, Nabopolassar conquered Harran – so the Assyrians moved their capital to Carchemish, on the Euphrates. In 609 B.C., Pharaoh Neco of Egypt had brought his army to defend Assyria – King Josiah of Judah had

sought to ambush the Egyptians, hoping to win Babylonian favor – but Pharaoh Neco soundly defeated Judah, killing Josiah in battle. Then Neco removed the pro-Babylonian Shallum (or Jehoahaz), and replaced him with the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim. Now, four years later, in 605 B.C., word comes to Jerusalem that Pharaoh Neco has been defeated – the joint Egyptian/Assyrian army destroyed – and the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, the hero of the Battle of Carchemish, has replaced his father as King of Babylon. Let's see – four years ago, your father sought to help the Babylonians; four years ago, the Egyptians killed your father, deposed your pro-Babylonian brother, and put you on the throne in order to have a pro-Egyptian ruler in Judah. Let's just say that the year 605 B.C. was not a good year for pro-Egyptian rulers. Assyria has fallen. Egypt is weak and helpless. And Nebuchadnezzar has dreams of restoring the great Babylonian Empire of old! Quite frankly, you don't need to be a prophet to know that Nebuchadnezzar will be coming your way in order to deal with Egypt – and if you are still pro-Egyptian, he will deal with you along the way! You only need to be a prophet to know what to do about it!

We have spent a lot of time in recent weeks focusing on Jeremiah's message regarding doing righteousness and justice. There is a big debate between those who say that idolatry is the chief sin, and those who say that failure to do justice is the chief sin. Jesus put an end to this debate in Matthew 22, when he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (Matt 22:37-40) Your biggest problem is that you don't love God. But one of the most obvious manifestations of your failure to love God is seen in the way that you treat those who are made in the image of God. You see, if you love God, then you will love that which reminds you of the one you love! And when you don't love God with all your heart, invariably you will love something else in place of God. We were created to love and serve him. So if we don't love and serve him, we will love and serve something else.

b. So I Will Bring My Servant Nebuchadnezzar to Destroy All These Nations (v8-11)

There are very few people whom God identifies by name as "my servant." Moses, Job, David – and a handful of others – culminating with our Lord Jesus. But among that elite company is Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, my servant. And the reason why should be clear enough: if you will not listen to my servants the prophets, then you will listen to my servant, the King of Babylon! And God says that he will turn the world upside down. All the curses of the covenant he will bring upon his own city: I will devote them to destruction, and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

c. After Seventy Years I Will Punish Babylon (v12-14)

Earlier, we sang Psalm 137 – a song that speaks of the blessing upon the one who dashes the Babylonian children's heads against the rocks. The author of Psalm 137 probably knew the prophecy of Jeremiah. The Psalmist knew that God had promised

that what Babylon had done to Jerusalem would be done in turn to Babylon. Judgment begins with the household of God.

2. The Cup of Wrath: To the Jew First and also to the Greek (25:15-29)

a. The LORD's Rule Over the Nations (v15-16)

The calling of Israel – indeed, the calling of the church – is not to be a ghetto, isolated from the world – but to be the colony of heaven – the place in this age where the kingdom of heaven is revealed. You see this in the table of the nations in verses 17-26.

b. Jeremiah's Table of the Nations That Shall Drink (v17-26)

Notice verse 18. “As at this day.” This probably comes from a later time in Jeremiah's ministry. In 605 BC, it is not obvious yet that Jerusalem is a “desolation and a waste.” But as we have seen repeatedly, the book of Jeremiah is not organized in chronological order, but as a collection of sermons and stories that remind the people of God in every age of the dangers of forgetting the LORD!

The order of the nations is roughly chronological. Egypt was the nation who oppressed Israel in the days of Moses. The following kings formed a “who's who” of the ancient enemies of Israel, gradually expanding out to the distant kingdoms “far and near” – “all the kingdoms of the world that are on the face of the earth.” And last of all, “the king of Babylon shall drink.” Now, you could see this as a prophecy of what would happen in the next generation. Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar did make the nations drink the cup of God's wrath. And then, finally, Babylon fell to the Medes and the Persians. But the imagery of Jeremiah 25 will be taken up in the book of Revelation, as “Babylon the Great” – the prostitute – becomes the queen of all the earth. In other words, the New Testament calls us to read the story of Babylon as the story of the city of man. In every generation Babylon continues to flourish under a new name and with a new leader. And Jeremiah gives us the principle – that judgment begins with the household of God, but if Jerusalem must drink, then what will become of the nations of the earth?

c. If Jerusalem Must Drink, What of the Nations of the Earth? (v27-29)

But think about what Jesus says: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Or think about how Paul says it: “The cup of blessing that we bless is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” Why do the NT authors put such an emphasis on the symbolic drinking of Christ's blood? Because only the blood of Christ can save you from the wrath of God. Everyone must drink the cup of God's wrath. There is no escape. But just as the waters of judgment in the Flood became the waters of salvation for Noah, so also the cup of wrath becomes the cup of salvation for those who trust in Jesus.

3. The Prophecy Against the Nations (25:30-38)

Our passage tonight ends with Jeremiah's prophecy against the nations (verses 30-38). This message is given to Jerusalem in order to encourage the faithful to endure. Yes, Babylon is going to win – for now – but in the end God wins.

a. The LORD Will Enter into Judgment with All Flesh (v30-33)

Verses 30-33 takes themes that Jeremiah has already used in his prophecy against Jerusalem and applies them to the nations. Don't worry, God may use the nations to punish you, but he will bring disaster upon them as well! Indeed, in verses 34-38, he even uses the language of the shepherds and the flock:

b. The Shepherds and the Flock Will Find No Refuge (v34-38)

There's not a whole lot of explanation of why. It should be obvious "why"! If Jerusalem is guilty, obviously the nations are guilty! You know how this works: you don't need me to convince you that American culture is corrupt! In the same way, the remnant (to whom Jeremiah is writing) needed no explanation of why Babylon and the nations were corrupt! In conclusion, I want to come back to that opening Psalm – Psalm 137. "O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! 11 Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!" The violent death of little children is one of the great signs of God's wrath against humanity. We struggle with this – because we intuitively recognize that they have done nothing to deserve this! But the Psalmist recognizes that because of sin there must be a day when God makes things right – when God makes the nations drink the cup of his wrath. And we can't be squeamish about what that means! It means that God will bring back upon their own heads what they have done to others! There is a way in which abortion in this country is not only a sin – but it is also God's judgment against sin – which continues to compound the sin. The prophets often speak of Israel's guilt in offering their children in the fire to Molech. And people often rightly compare this to the modern practice of abortion. But I do not think that people understand the significance of the comparison. If child sacrifice was a necessary part of the idolatry of the nations, then so long as that idolatry remained, child sacrifice would continue. This is why the prophets do not mount a campaign to end child sacrifice! They mount a campaign to end idolatry. I would love to see the practice of abortion end in our country. But so long as we continue our national idolatry of convenience and personal comfort we will never end abortion. The prophets understood that "righteousness" is not something that can be established piecemeal. Yes, it is good and right to do justice in particular cases – so it is good to seek justice for the unborn! I am glad to see many of our members involved in this! But don't get your hopes up! If you have a fundamentally unrighteous state, you can only expect partial justice. If the root of idolatry remains, the fruit of wickedness cannot be removed! We need to focus our energy on being a righteous community that protects the weak and gives a home to the helpless (of all ages!). We've done a great job of doing this for one another. (And quite frankly, you can't do it for outsiders unless you do it for one another!) Now we need to build on that and do better at drawing others in.

TEXT: Jeremiah 26:1-24

TITLE: THE DANGERS OF FAITHFULLY PROCLAIMING GOD'S WORD

BIG IDEA:

IN THE FACE OF SEVERE OPPOSITION AND EVEN THE THREAT OF MARTYRDOM, THE PROPHET OF GOD MUST REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE WORD OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Messages of impending judgment have never been popular – especially when directed towards a self-righteous, outwardly religious populace that prides itself on its invincibility and refuses to acknowledge its sin. It would be easy in such a context to try to soften the blow of God's thunderous declarations. But Jeremiah courageously faced up to the burden of his calling and took his stand on the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. He was willing to let the chips fall where they may – even if that meant his own execution. God has not called us to spineless Christianity. We are not some form of jellyfish that changes according to the pressure of the moment. We must courageously take a stand and fulfill our calling.

IN THE FACE OF SEVERE OPPOSITION AND EVEN THE THREAT OF MARTYRDOM, THE PROPHET OF GOD MUST REMAIN FAITHFUL TO THE WORD OF GOD

I. (:1-6) JEREMIAH -- TAKING A STAND AND PROVING FAITHFUL

A. (:1-3) Charge to Jeremiah to Speak God's Word

1. The Time Stamp for the Prophecy

"In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah,"

Kidner: Little more than three months had seen King Josiah killed in battle, his successor deported to Egypt, and this third king, a man of no scruples, imposed on the country. At such a moment, to give strong warnings of potentially worse things in store was to take one's life in one's hands, especially when these warnings touched the temple and the holy city, popularly thought to be inviolable.

2. The Authority Behind the Prophecy

"this word came from the LORD, saying, 'Thus says the LORD,'"

God's message is clear and demands faithful communication

3. The Place of the Prophecy

"Stand in the court of the LORD's house,"

Quite a challenge presented here to Jeremiah by the Lord

4. The Intended Audience for the Prophecy

“and speak to all the cities of Judah who have come to worship in the LORD’s house”

5. The Scope of the Prophecy

“all the words that I have commanded you to speak to them. Do not omit a word!”

Avoid the temptation to soften the prophetic burden or to try to make it more palatable

6. The Goal of the Prophecy

“Perhaps they will listen and everyone will turn from his evil way, that I may repent of the calamity which I am planning to do to them because of the evil of their deeds.”

Even at this point the possibility of repentance is presented as a way for the nation to escape the unleashing of God’s wrath

B. (:4-6) Curse Promised for Stubborn Refusal to Repent

“And you will say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, to listen to the words of My servants the prophets, whom I have been sending to you again and again, but you have not listened; then I will make this house like Shiloh, and this city I will make a curse to all the nations of the earth.’”

Feinberg: Here we have a kind of precis of the longer address in **chapter 7**.

Mackay: It should also be recognized that the two accounts of the sermon are presented for different purposes. The first account in **chapter 7** is set in the context of Jeremiah’s preaching, warning the community that they must reform their behavior or the city will be destroyed. The second account in **chapter 26** is placed at the beginning of the story of how the destruction of the city came about. It sets out the personal danger that had to be faced by Jeremiah, whose message set him at odds with the ecclesiastical leaders of Judah. Here we have a portrait of the spiritual confusion and imperceptivity that held sway at the religious center of the land.

Parunak: They must heed two channels of God’s revelation:

1) *“my law, which I have set before you”* – the Law of Moses, corresponding for us to the Scriptures. The fixed, written revelation of God.

2) *“the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you”* – the dynamic, current ministry of God’s Spirit to his people, corresponding for us to the exercise of the gifts in the local assembly.

Application: The Bible by itself is not enough. The RCC says, “Bible +

tradition.” The reformed churches say, “Bible + creed.” We believe, “Bible + Spirit of God,” and that Spirit has always worked through the people of God. It is tempting to say, “All I need is the Bible; I don’t need to fellowship with other believers.” Nothing could be further from the truth! We need BOTH the foundation of God’s Word AND the continuing ministry of his Spirit to guide us in our daily lives.

Constable: *Making the temple like Shiloh* would involve three things: desecration of the sanctuary, removal of the holy furniture, and withdrawal of Yahweh's name

Longman: The divine oracle has a tone of pessimism concerning the possibility of repentance since it mentions that the people have not listened in the past to **my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again.**

Mackay: Centuries before, Shiloh had not escaped destruction even though the ark had been located at a sanctuary there and Shiloh had been the centre for the worship of the Lord in the land. In the same way one of the principal points of confidence in the false religion of the people was the inviolability of the sanctuary and the holy city, but Jerusalem too was under threat of having here special privileges annulled and becoming a deserted ruin.

II. (:7-15) JEREMIAH -- TAKING THE HEAT AND OFFERING HIS DEFENSE

A. (:7-9) Execution Demanded by the Religious Leaders and the People

“The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, ‘You must die! Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD saying, ‘This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant?’ And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.”

Almost a mob type of mentality with the people in a frenzy; if the royal officials had not intervened at this point, the situation was ripe for a lynching

Longman: Perhaps they demanded the death penalty simply out of rage, but they may have thought that Jeremiah blasphemed God by suggesting that God’s house, the temple, would be destroyed. Thus it is possible that their hatred toward Jeremiah was generated by a misplaced religious devotion.

B. (:10-11) Execution Entertained by the Civil Authorities

“When the officials of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the LORD and sat in the entrance of the New Gate of the LORD’s house. Then the priests and the prophets spoke to the officials and to all the people, saying, ‘A death sentence for this man! For he has prophesied

against this city as you have heard in your hearing.”

Mackay: There is no doubt that “*they sat*” indicates that a court had formally been convened. In general at this point in the middle of Jehoiakim’s reign the officials seem less hostile towards Jeremiah than the religious community.

C. (:12-15) Defense Made by Jeremiah

“Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and to all the people, saying,”

Chiastic structure

1. I Am God’s Faithful Prophet

“The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard.”

2. You Need to Repent to Avoid Judgment

“Now therefore amend your ways and your deeds and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will change His mind about the misfortune which He has pronounced against you.”

3. Be Careful What You Do With Me

“But as for me, behold, I am in your hands; do with me as is good and right in your sight. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city and on its inhabitants;”

4. I Am God’s Faithful Prophet

“for truly the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.”

Wiersbe: Jeremiah then presented three arguments in his defense:

- 1) First, what he had spoken was commanded by the Lord because the Lord had sent him (**Jer. 26:12, 15**). If they killed him, they were killing one of God’s prophets, and he would rather be faithful to God and die than unfaithful and live.
- 2) Second, *they* were the ones in danger; he was the one seeking to rescue them!
- 3) Third, if they killed him, they would shed innocent blood, and that would only make their impending judgment worse.

III. (:16-24) JEREMIAH -- AVOIDING EXECUTION AND RECEIVING SUPPORT

A. (:16) Jeremiah Defended

“Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, ‘No death sentence for this man! For he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.’”

B. (:17-23) Two Historical Case Studies Reviewed

1. (:17-19) Case Study of Micah of Moresheth – Spared by Hezekiah

Precedent in Favor of Jeremiah Providing the Basis for His Release:

“Then some of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying, ‘Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus the LORD of hosts has said, Zion will be plowed as a field, And Jerusalem will become ruins, And the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and the LORD changed His mind about the misfortune which He had pronounced against them? But we are committing a great evil against ourselves.’”

2. (:20-23) Case Study of Uriah the son of Shemaiah – Killed by Jehoiakim

Precedent Against Jeremiah—Showing His Grave Danger:

“Indeed, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land words similar to all those of Jeremiah. When King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, then the king sought to put him to death; but Uriah heard it, and he was afraid and fled and went to Egypt. Then King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him went into Egypt. And they brought Uriah from Egypt and led him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with a sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people.”

Constable: The king put Uriah to death and gave his body an undistinguished burial, probably in the valley of Kidron (cf. **2 Kings 23:6**). The prophet Zechariah is the only other prophet whose execution the Old Testament records (**Matthew 23:35**; cf. **2 Chronicles 24:20-22**). However, there appear to have been other martyrs among the prophets (cf. **Matthew 23:37**; **Luke 13:34**). Perhaps the writer included the information about Uriah’s death to help us appreciate the great danger in which Jeremiah stood. God does not protect all His faithful servants from death at the hands of their enemies.

Thompson: It seems clear that the narrator included this incident (vv. **20-23**) to stress the very great danger in which Jeremiah stood when he continued to preach in the way he did.

C. (:24) Jeremiah Spared

“But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that he was not given into the hands of the people to put him to death.”

Longman: Ahikam is later mentioned as the son of Gedaliah (**Jer. 40:5, 6, 7, 9**, etc.), the Babylonian appointed governor of Judah during the early exilic period and a man with whom Jeremiah also had a close relationship.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What parallels and differences do you see between Jeremiah’s trial here and the trials of Jesus and of Stephen (**Acts 6:8 – 8:1**) and of Paul (**Acts 16**)?
- 2) What are some positive signs in this passage that show that the Jews at this time still had some level of discernment and ability to choose what was right?
- 3) When has your faithfulness to God been tested?
- 4) How would you characterize the approach taken by Jeremiah’s accusers with the approach taken by Jeremiah in his defense?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: The leaders of organized religion are often the most ardent opponents of true believers. Cf. the NCC recognition of Nelson Mandela this week, when a richly robed cleric introduced him as “the bright and morning star of our faith,” a title of Christ! Do not assume that just because someone has “Rev.” in front of his name or a collar on backward, he is more likely to protect the gospel than John Doe on the street. Just the opposite is too often the case.

Ironically, their power and influence stemmed from Josiah’s reform only about 15 years before (622; J’qim’s first year is 609). Josiah strengthened the temple in order to purge out idolatry. Now, not two decades later, the interests he vested with power have become corrupt. To understand why, recall that priests served from age 30 to age 50 (**Num. 4:3**). Their period of service is thus 20 years, and at the time of Josiah, the average priest would be on average 40 years old. Thus, by the time of this event, more than half of the priests would have come on board *since* the reform. They did not experience it first hand, but only preserved a second-hand acquaintance with it.

Applications: Beware second-hand reforms! You must deal personally with God in your own life, or else you will become hardened, traditional, and in fact rejecting to the truth of God. The last two thousand years have known numerous revivals and

reforms. Every one has degenerated into opposition to the Lord Jesus.

Peter Wallace: Jeremiah Among the Prophets

Most of you face the question, “How does a believer live in the middle of a culture that sort of believes – that thinks of itself as vaguely believing – but does all sorts of stuff that is totally inconsistent with that profession!?” Because that is where Jeremiah lived. Jeremiah 26 does not necessarily help us figure out how everything should be. But it does help us think about what it means to follow Jesus when everything around us is not the way it should be.

Our passage tonight helps us to see that Jeremiah was not alone. There were others around him who saw the same problems. Some of them died trying to change the system. Others protected Jeremiah without getting in trouble themselves. When the world is not as it should be, there will be a variety of callings necessary for the people of God to survive!

Last time we talked about Jeremiah’s prophecy of the triumph of Nebuchadnezzar. That was in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 BC). Tonight we take a step back: “In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim...” This is the dreadful year of 609 B.C. – the year when everything went wrong! In the spring, King Josiah had gone out to meet Pharaoh Neco in battle. King Josiah was a good king – a reforming king – a king who feared God and did justice in the land. Thirteen years ago – in 622 B.C. – Hilkiah the priest had found the scroll of the Law, and had brought to Josiah. Josiah heard the Law of Moses – the first king in centuries – and he repented and believed the word of the LORD – and brought Jerusalem into conformity to God’s law. Kings like Josiah are supposed to triumph over their enemies! But Josiah fell in battle and the armies of Judah were defeated. Josiah’s son, Shallum (or Jehoahaz), replaced him. But Pharaoh Neco dethroned the pro-Babylonian Shallum and set Jehoiakim on the throne, with the expectation that Jehoiakim would be loyal to him! And so, in 609 BC, just months after the death of his father Josiah, and the exile of his brother Shallum:

1. Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon (v1-6 – see Jeremiah 7)

The problem with Jerusalem is that they will not listen to the law or the prophets. Notice v 4 – “if you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you” – and v 5 – “and to listen to the words of my servants the prophets whom I send to your urgently.” If you will not listen to the law and the prophets, then God will destroy you – just like he did to Shiloh. We heard a more detailed version this sermon back in Jeremiah chapter 7, verses 1-15. Jeremiah was sent to the temple – the center of the problem that he has come to address. If you repent and return to the LORD, then God will let you dwell in this place. Words are not enough. We saw in chapter 7 that you must amend your ways and your deeds.

The problem in Jeremiah’s day was that Jerusalem’s repentance was only half-hearted. If you say that you are sorry, but you keep doing wickedness – that is not enough. Repentance is not just a matter of words, but of deeds. And Jeremiah warned in chapter 7: 4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple

of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’ This is where Jeremiah gets radical. The people of Israel had often repented. They had cried out to the LORD, and the LORD saved them from their enemies. Indeed, Solomon had prayed at the dedication of the temple, “When your people Israel are defeated before the enemy because they have sinned against you, and if they turn again to you and acknowledge your name and pray and plead with you in this house, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and bring them again to the land that you gave to their fathers.” (1 Kings 8:32-34) Solomon had told them to pray in this house. The glory of the LORD had filled this house. Israel’s failures and shortcomings were covered in this house!

But God says that the “temple of the LORD” is not why I will let you dwell in the land. As Jeremiah had said in 7:5-7 5 “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. If you change your ways, then I will let you dwell in this place. This is a dramatic challenge to Jerusalem and Judah. The warning is very clear: if you do not change, then you may not live here.

Yes, God promised the land to Abraham and his descendents forever. But that does not mean that any particular descendent of Abraham has a right to live in the land. This is the point that Paul will make in Romans 4. The promise was not made to Abraham’s genetics. The promise was made to Abraham’s faith. Without the faith of Abraham you may not receive the inheritance of Abraham. And if you have the faith of Abraham, you will also share the obedience of Abraham. God will be faithful to his promises – and his salvation is always by grace – but that does not mean that you can ignore his commands!

As Christopher Wright puts it, “Obedience was never the means of earning the land. But it was the condition in which the grace-gift could be possessed and enjoyed.... Obedience is the only way to enjoy the blessing of God’s promise.” (p110) As the old hymn says, “Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Judah kept saying, “The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” But the temple of the Lord cannot save them! What lies do you believe? What deceptive words do you trust? Well, let me ask you this: what sins do you regularly confess every Sunday? Jeremiah’s point here is that the people of God are using the temple as a means of not really dealing with sin. Their idea was that so long as we all “go to church” and say “sorry,” we can live however we want!

How often do we do the same thing? You hear the declaration of pardon every week: “Believer in Jesus Christ, you are free from the guilt and the power of sin!” If you respond to that by saying, “Oh, goody, now I can go back and sin again this week!” – then you are missing the point of the temple! “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know

that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:1-4)

Jeremiah also had strong words for this in 7:11: 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. A den of robbers is a safe place for robbers. Robbers will go out and steal – and then run back to their den – their hideout – for protection. Here God asks, is my temple a robbers den to you?! Is this house – which is called by my name – a safe place for those who reject my law? Jesus quotes this verse when he drives out the money-changers. I think that sometimes we only focus on the fact that they were money-changers. But the idea of a “den of robbers” is not just about robbing. It is the idea that this is a safe place for those who practice injustice. The temple should not be a safe place for robbers. The church should never be a “safe place” for those who want to go out and harm others.

And so God calls Jerusalem to remember what he did in Shiloh (v6) The tabernacle had been set up in Shiloh. The ark of the covenant had dwelt there – until the days of Eli, when it was captured by the Philistines – when the sons of Eli, Hophni and Phineas, died in the battle – and then, when he heard the news that the ark of God had been captured, Eli fell over and died – and then his daughter-in-law died in childbirth, and as she lay dying, she named the boy “Ichabod” (no-glory) because the glory had departed from Israel. We sang about this in Psalm 78 – and as we sang Psalm 78, you might have come away thinking, “now that God has raised up David, Shiloh will never happen again!” Certainly the crowd that was listening to the sermon in Jeremiah 26 – the crowd that seized Jeremiah and demanded his death – they thought that Shiloh would never happen again!

2. What to Do with a Renegade Prophet? The Response to Jeremiah’s Temple Sermon (v7- 19)

I call Jeremiah a “renegade prophet” because he is not in line with the rest of the prophetic guild. Verse 8 indicates that the “prophets” were allied with the “priests” in laying hold of Jeremiah and accusing him of being a false prophet.

a. The Priests and Prophets and All the People: “You Shall Die” (v7-9)

Moses had been very clear that a prophet who speaks lies in the name of the LORD should die. The prophets in Jerusalem are convinced that Jeremiah is contradicting the promises of God. But here is the heartbreaking part of the story: Jeremiah had included in his message the way to avoid God’s judgment against Jerusalem: “It may be they will listen, and everyone turn from his evil way, that I may relent of the disaster that I intend to do to them because of their evil deeds.” (v3) All you have to do is repent – turn from your evil deeds. The ensuing trial provides us with insight into the legal system of Jerusalem at the time.

b. The Accusation Against Jeremiah: He Deserves Death (v10-11)

The officials of Judah are summoned – and they take their seat in the entry of the New Gate. The priests and prophets were convinced that Jeremiah is a threat to the political stability of Judah. They say that he deserves death for one basic reason: “he has prophesied against this city.” This is the challenge of adjudicating a case of “false prophecy.” How do you prove the charge unless you wait for the event? The priests and prophets think that they have an iron-clad proof: “he has prophesied against this city.” Jeremiah has spoken against the political-theological orthodoxy of the day. This is the city where God’s name dwells. God had established Jerusalem to be a permanent house – unlike Shiloh!

Earlier we sang Psalm 78. Psalm 78 contrasts Shiloh with Mount Zion. God “forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind.” And “he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves. He built his sanctuary like the high heavens...He chose David his servant.” Shiloh – tabernacle – temporary. 7 Mount Zion – temple – permanent. A literal reading of Psalm 78 would lead you to believe that Jerusalem is fundamentally different than Shiloh. The priests and the prophets of Jerusalem are choosing to interpret the scriptures in a way that reads the curses and warnings as entirely past. Yes, Moses gave those warnings – but they were fulfilled at Shiloh. Now that God has established his covenant with David, this temple will never be destroyed.

c. Jeremiah’s Defense: the LORD Sent Me (v12-15)

God has told Jeremiah that Jerusalem is not going to repent. But God is always ready to forgive. As the prophet Jonah demonstrated, when Nineveh repented, God forgave them! If even Nineveh can repent – then surely God will listen if Jerusalem repents! Verse 14 makes an important distinction between the prophet and his message. Jeremiah submits to their authority. “But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you.”

Jeremiah is a model of the sort of non-violent resistance that Martin Luther King, Jr, would advocate in the 20th century. He submits to the duly constituted authority – even as he protests that it is acting unjustly. Jeremiah’s speech does not appear to have convinced the priests and the prophets. They remain hostile. But notice that in verse 16, the people now appear to be on Jeremiah’s side.

d. The Verdict of the Officials (and All the People):

Remember Micah and Hezekiah (v16-19) You see the same thing with Jesus. The same people who hailed him as the Son of David at the triumphal entry will call out “crucify him” at his trial. The people are fickle. But having heard Jeremiah’s defense, the officials declare their verdict: 16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, “This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.”

When they say “in the name of Yahweh our God” they don’t just mean that he claimed to speak for the LORD. Rather, “he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God” means that his speaking is consistent with the name and character of Yahweh. If

he had said, “Yahweh says let’s go worship idols,” they would not have replied this way! Speaking in the name of the LORD requires that the content of what you say fits the character of the LORD.

But then the rationale for the verdict is found in verses 17-19: 17 And certain of the elders of the land arose and spoke to all the assembled people, saying, Notice who speaks in Jeremiah’s defense: “certain elders of the land.” They are not “officials” – nor even elders in Jerusalem. They are “country elders” – outsiders in Jerusalem. Perhaps they are not as intimidated by the temple establishment – perhaps they see the corruption of Jerusalem like Jeremiah does – but either way, they remind the assembly of the days of Hezekiah – 100 years earlier. 18 “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.’ 19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves.”

Micah had been a prophet in the days of Hezekiah. We usually think of Isaiah – but that may be simply because Isaiah wrote more! At least in Jeremiah’s day, Micah appears to have been the more famous of the two. The elders of the land remember back to the prophecy of Micah (found in Micah 3:12) and how Micah had said that Jerusalem would become a heap of ruins. 9 Micah had warned Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah – Now, think about this: Micah had said that Jerusalem would become a heap of ruins. That didn’t happen. Does this mean that Micah was a false prophet? No! The reason why God sends prophets is to call people to repentance: If you do not repent, then you will die! Hezekiah and all Judah responded by repenting and asking God for mercy – and the result was that God relented of the disaster. When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD (i.e., his prophecy is consistent with what God has said in the past) – then we should not kill that prophet! Remember Hezekiah! If we put Jeremiah to death, then we will bring great disaster upon ourselves – because not only are we ignoring his warning, but we are also guilty of murdering the innocent!

It seems safe to say that there was a portion of the elders of the land – the elders from the villages – who are concerned about the trajectory of the Jerusalem establishment. Yes, Josiah was a great king. But his son, Jehoiakim, does not appear to be following in his father’s steps. Rather than listen to the prophet, and ask God for mercy, this king appears fixated on following his own self-absorbed policies. In this way, you might see an echo of Rehoboam in Jehoiakim. Solomon was the great king who built the temple. Rehoboam, his son, refused the wise advice of the elders, and threatened his people with hard labor. Rehoboam lost the ten northern tribes for that! Josiah was the last great king who heeded the law of the LORD. Jehoiakim his son refused to listen to the elders of the land. And Jehoiakim will lose the temple itself because of it! In Jeremiah 51 we will hear about how Jeremiah wrote down his prophecies against Babylon and sent them in a scroll to Babylon with Seraiah. Seraiah would bring the message of Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles. Seraiah’s brother, Baruch, will bring the message of Jeremiah

to Egypt.

The lesson of Jeremiah for the exiles is part of our story: Jerusalem fell because they refused to listen to God's law. Jerusalem fell because they would not heed the prophets. If you do not listen to the Law and the Prophets, you are doomed.

3. A Tale of Two Prophets: Uriah and Jeremiah (v20-24)

And, as if to illustrate the problem: 20 There was another man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim. He prophesied against this city and against this land in words like those of Jeremiah. This reminds us that there were many prophets – most of whom never wrote anything down. We know nothing else about Uriah, besides these few verses. Uriah's words angered the King – just like Jeremiah's did. But the contrast with Jeremiah is clear. Because when Uriah heard of the anger of King Jehoiakim, and how Jehoiakim sought to put him to death, he became afraid and escaped to Egypt. Jeremiah never ran away. There was a good reason for this: God had promised that he would protect him from his foes. God gave no such promise to Uriah. 21 And when King Jehoiakim, with all his warriors and all the officials, heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But when Uriah heard of it, he was afraid and fled and escaped to Egypt. 22 Then King Jehoiakim sent to Egypt certain men, Elnathan the son of Achbor and others with him, 23 and they took Uriah from Egypt and brought him to King Jehoiakim, who struck him down with the sword and dumped his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

Remember that Jehoiakim had been established as king by Pharaoh Neco. Therefore, Neco would be quite happy to help his protégé take care of a minor nuisance. But why does the book of Jeremiah tell us about Uriah now. Remember the warning of Jeremiah in verse 15 – “if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves...” and remember the warning of the elders of the land in verse 19 – “Did Hezekiah...not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD...” What does Jehoiakim do? He puts Uriah to death. He does not fear the LORD – but he slaughters the prophets. 11 Indeed, the verb suggests that King Jehoiakim himself struck down Uriah with his own sword. Later, in chapter 36, we will hear that Jeremiah hid from Jehoiakim at times in order to escape his wrath.

24 But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death. Good old Ahikam! Ahikam had been present on the day when the Book of the Law had been found and was read to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:12). In fact, his father, Shaphan, was the scribe who read the Book of the Law to Josiah! Now, 13 years later, Ahikam protects Jeremiah from the wrath of Josiah's son. Jeremiah will have reason to hide from Jehoiakim later (ch 36 – in the 4th year of Jehoiakim). For now, he relies on the protection of the royal scribe.

But we are much more like Uriah than Jeremiah. We have no particular promise that God will protect us from harm. We – like Uriah – only have the promise that God will raise us up at the last day! We need to think seriously about this. If you try to call rulers to repentance, you may seriously suffer for it. It doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it!

But you need to count the cost before you do it! Don't assume that there is a one-size fits all approach. Uriah was called to die for his faith. Jeremiah was not – but was called to be equally blunt. Ahikam was not called to preach – but was called to protect Jeremiah. The elders of the land were called to remind the people and the rulers of the importance of listening to the prophets. When things are not the way they should be, there may be considerable variety in the way that God calls his servants to respond!

Daryl Hilbert: The Temple Address – Part 2

I. CONTEXT

A. Chapters 26-45 combine incidents in the life of Jeremiah. Some are autobiographical (cf. the first personal pronoun); others are biographical (cf. the third personal pronoun). This chapter (ch.26) gives us the setting of the temple address (Jer 7:1-20). Almost all commentators connect that address with the one in chapter 26, even though some say that no relationship is demanded since Jeremiah often repeated material in his messages and frequently spoke in the temple (so KD). But the affinities between chapters 7 and 26 are too many and too minute for them not to relate to the same address. **Here in chapter 26 the emphasis is on the results of the temple address and on a brief summary of it.** In a sense, the first verses of this chapter give us a condensation of chapters 7-10. The heart of the temple address was that unless Judah repented, Jerusalem would be as Shiloh. By his specific warnings, Jeremiah had incurred the wrath of the false prophets and their followers. And later on when he predicted the seventy years' captivity, they tried to bring about his death (EXP).

B. Outline of Jeremiah 7

JUDAH'S IMMINENT AND TERRIBLE INVASION (Jer 7:1-34)

- A. Judah's Temple Abuses (Jer 7:1-11)
- B. Judah Will Become Like Shiloh (Jer 7:12-15)
- C. Do Not Pray but Prophecy Against Judah (Jer 7:16-28)
- D. Hinnom Will Be Called Valley of Slaughter (Jer 7:29-34)

II. THE TEMPLE ADDRESS (Jer 26:1-6)

A. Beginning of Jehoiakim's Reign (1) - The "Temple Address" took place four years earlier than the last chapter (cf. Jer 25:1). Both took place during the reign of Jehoiakim, but this took place at the beginning of his reign.

B. Court of the Lord's House (2) - Jeremiah was to gain the attention of everyone by standing in the court of the Lord's house to give his prophecy. It was, most likely, a feast day when Judah gathered at the Temple. Jeremiah was not to omit a word of the prophecy.

C. Purpose was Repentance (3) - If Judah listened and repented of its temple abuses (Jer 7:9-11), then the Lord would change His mind (repent - nacham - repent or change the mind) concerning their judgment.

D. Walk in My Law (4) - They were warned about keeping the Law. They had abused the Mosaic Law by:

- 1) using the Temple as a good luck charm (Jer 7:4),
- 2) being greedy and swindling their neighbors (Jer 7:5), and
- 3) taking advantage (including violence) of those who could not defend themselves (Jer 7:6).

In addition, they were stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely (Jer 7:9a), and sacrificing to Baal, while at the same time worshipping Yahweh (Jer 7:9-11).

E. Listen to My Prophets (5) - They had not listened to the Lord's word through the prophets. Some of the other prophets to the kings of Judah around Jeremiah's time were Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel. Not only did the people refuse to listen, but they arrested Jeremiah and killed the prophet Uriah (cf. Jer 26:20-24).

F. You Will Become Like Shiloh (6)

1. The consequence for such temple abuses and disobedience to the Lord was that Judah would become like Shiloh and become "a curse to all the nations of the earth."

2. Shiloh became the first permanent residence for the Tabernacle (Jos 18:1). At one time, Shiloh was Israel's religious capitol and center of worship (Jug 21:19; 1Sa 1:1-3). It was also where the Lord's presence and name dwelt (Jer 7:12). However, because of Israel's idolatry the ark was temporarily captured by the Philistines (1Sa 2:12, 17; 3:13-14; 4:11, 17-18) and Shiloh was destroyed (Psa 78:60). The only account of Shiloh's destruction is found in Jeremiah (Jer 7:12-14; 26:6). Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of Shiloh's destruction dating about 1050 B.C. Its destruction was most likely by the Philistines.

III. ARREST AND TRIAL BY PRIESTS AND PROPHETS (Jer 26:7-11)

A. Jeremiah Seized by Priests, Prophets, People (7-8) - Judah was gathered to hear Jeremiah's words but they did not take kindly to them. In fact, they seized him in order to put him to death. Jeremiah's abductors included the priests, the prophets, and the people.

B. Inquisition of Jeremiah (9) - It may appear strange, but they questioned Jeremiah about his prophecy. They were so accustomed to hearing false prophecies that when they heard the truth, they became enraged.

1. He was arrested and the death penalty pronounced on him. The priests, prophets, and people refused to believe his seemingly incredible prediction (v.9). For them it was blasphemy and false prophecy both of which were crimes punishable by death in accordance with the law of Moses [cf. Deut 18:20] (EXP).

2. It is clear that the priests and false prophets were at the forefront of the opposition to Jeremiah. They were angered because they had consistently promised immunity to the city and sanctuary, relying on God's past deliverances as in Hezekiah's day [cf. Isa 37:36-37] (EXP).

C. Officials Met at New Gate (10) - The officials of Judah (civic leaders) from the king's house heard about the uproar and came to investigate. They went to the Temple

and sat at the meeting place at the New Gate. The Targum identified the New Gate as the “Eastern Gate” on the east side of the Temple.

D. Pronounced Death Sentence (11) - Though the priests and prophets were themselves following false prophecies, they were ready to kill Jeremiah for supposedly prophesying falsely (Deu 18:20). The priests and prophets made the case that Jeremiah deserved the death sentence for prophesying against the city. They never mentioned that he had also prophesied against them.

IV. JEREMIAH’S DEFENSE (Jer 26:12-16)

A. Defense: Lord’s Prophecy (12) - Jeremiah’s defense was that the words were not his own but the Lord’s. Jesus made the same claim during His earthly ministry (Joh 8:26-28; Joh 14:10). The Lord had sent Jeremiah to prophesy judgment.

B. Therefore Repent (13) - Though Jeremiah is known as the “weeping prophet,” he should also be known as the “courageous prophet.” Jeremiah again called for them to amend their ways and deeds. If they would repent, the Lord would “change His mind” (nacham - repent or change the mind [Num 23:19], no doubt a play on words) about their judgment.

C. Jeremiah was in their Hands (14) - The “courageous prophet” stated that they could do whatever they had in their minds to do to him. It would not change a thing. God’s judgment was on its way because of their unrepentance.

D. Innocent Blood on Your Hands (15) - However, they would have Jeremiah’s innocent blood on their hands. This would add one more sin to the list for which God was judging them.

E. Death Sentence Withdrawn (16) - Jeremiah’s courage, truth, and wisdom, along with the Spirit’s influence, caused the officials and the people (not the priests and prophets) to withdraw the death sentence.

V. RESPONSE OF HEZEKIAH VS. JEHOIAKIM (Jer 26:17-24)

A. Hezekiah’s Response to Micah (Jer 26:17-19)

1. Elders of the Land (17) - It was the leaders (“elders”) of the tribes who bestow wisdom to the multitude.

2. Micah’s Prophecy (18) - They spoke of Micah the prophet’s influence on King Hezekiah and the people in Mic 3:12.

3. Hezekiah’s Response (19) - Not only did King Hezekiah do “right in the sight of the LORD (cf. 2Ki 18:1-6),” but he did not even consider killing Micah, unlike Jeremiah’s inquisitors.

B. Jehoiakim’s Response to Uriah (Jer 26:20-24)

1. Uriah Prophesied (20) - Uriah the son of Shemaiah (another true prophet mentioned only here) was from Kiriath-jearim, the place where the ark of the covenant was kept between the time of Samuel until the time of David (cf. 1Sa 7:2). He

prophesied against the city also.

2. Jehoiakim Attempted to Kill Uriah (21) - Jehoiakim wanted to put Uriah to death for prophesying against the city. But Uriah fled to Egypt.

3. Jehoiakim Sought Uriah (22) - Jehoiakim sent Elnathan, a high ranking official, to search for Uriah in Egypt.

4. Jehoiakim Slew Uriah (23) - When Uriah was brought back to Jehoiakim, they had him put to death and cast his body in a common burial place rather than a prophet's tomb.

5. Ahikam Spares Jeremiah (24) - [Ahikam] used his strategic influence to spring Jeremiah free of the death threat. This civil leader under King Josiah [cf. 2 Kin. 22:12, 14] and father of Gedaliah, was appointed governor over Judah by the Babylonians after Jerusalem's final fall in 586 B.C. [Jer 39:14; 40:13–41:3] (MSB).

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. Sometimes men can cling to false prophecies so tightly that they begin to consider the truth as a false prophecy (Jer 26:11).

B. God's judgment can be conditional, but sometimes men cannot be conditioned to repent (cf. Jer 26:3, 13).

C. Sometimes the honest truth is the Spirit's choice of influence. At other times, it is His choice of judgment. There was no guarantee for Uriah and Jeremiah, or even for believers today.

TEXT: Jeremiah 27:1-22

TITLE: THE YOKE OF SUBMISSION

BIG IDEA:

SUBMIT TO GOD’S AUTHORITY – EVEN WHEN IT IS ADMINISTERED IN SURPRISING WAYS

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes our conviction regarding the sovereignty of God can be severely tested. We easily acknowledge that the Bible teaches that God can put whoever He wants in a position of power – whether in government or in other arenas of authority. But we also have an innate propensity to assume that God is always making our paths more comfortable and pleasant. So we have difficulty embracing the path of oppression and suffering.

Certainly the nation of Israel felt superior to foreign powers like Babylon. When God chose to discipline His people with the rod of King Nebuchadnezzar, it was a difficult pill to swallow. In fact, the prophets of the land continued to advocate a path of resistance – promising the people that the God of the Covenant would take their side in the immediate future. But God had other plans. He commissioned Jeremiah, His true spokesman, to act out another object lesson – wearing the yoke of submission to signify that God’s plans involved temporary subjugation to Babylon.

SUBMIT TO GOD’S AUTHORITY – EVEN WHEN IT IS ADMINISTERED IN SURPRISING WAYS

**I. (:1-11) DELIVERANCE THRU SUBMISSION –
OBJECT LESSON FOR JEREMIAH OF YOKES OF BONDAGE –
REINFORCING THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD OVER ALL NATIONS**

(:1-2A) Introduction

“In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying— thus says the LORD to me—”

A. (:2B) Act Out the Object Lesson

“Make for yourself bonds and yokes and put them on your neck,”

Parunak: It is a common image in the Bible . . . that a subject people wears the yoke of the ruler. Shows that they are subject to the king, just as an ox is subject to the farmer whose plow it pulls. Here Jer is to prepare these symbols of subjection, wear them himself, and give them to the ambassadors gathered in Jerusalem to take back to their kings. Certainly, not part of the ceremonies that Zed had planned for his guests!

Mackay: The animal that wore the yoke was one that had been domesticated and was under the control of its owner. If it was a slave with a yoke on his shoulders, his status

too was evident. Consequently, “yoke” was used as a term for domination by another party (**Deut. 28:48; 1 Kgs. 22:10-11; Ezek. 7:23**). Jeremiah’s message therefore was that the nations had to accept the political subjugation to Nebuchadnezzar. This would involve paying tribute to him and sending conscripts to serve in his army, but would have left their countries relatively intact.

B. (:3-8) Announce Divine Appointment of Nebuchadnezzar as Ruling Power

1. (:3) Send Word to the Surrounding Kings via Their Ambassadors

“and send word to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the sons of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon by the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah.”

Parunak: The western kings have sent their ambassadors to Jerusalem to plan a coalition to throw off Babylonian control.

Constable: The Babylonian Chronicles illuminate the historical background of this situation. Two years earlier an unnamed enemy had attacked Nebuchadnezzar, and the following year he had to deal with a revolt within his borders. Smaller nations in the west saw this as an opportunity to throw off Babylon's authority. The same nations had formed a confederacy to revolt against Assyria years earlier, so the purpose of these messengers seems to have been to form another treaty but this time against Babylon.

Feinberg: Jeremiah required great courage to stand against these envoys as well as his own countrymen, but Jeremiah was exercising his commission as a prophet to the nations (cf. **1:10**).

2. (:4-7) Set Up Nebuchadnezzar as the Ruling Power

a. (:4-5) Based on God’s Sovereignty

“Command them to go to their masters, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, thus you shall say to your masters, I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight.’”

b. (:6-7) Balanced by Eventual Overthrow

“Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and I have given him also the wild animals of the field to serve him. All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes; then many nations and great kings will make him their servant.”

Mackay: If even the untamed animals will be subject to him, how much more the domestic animals who bear the yoke? It is therefore wisdom to accept the yoke of his dominion.

3. (:8) Specify Punishment for Refusal to Submit

“It will be, that the nation or the kingdom which will not serve him, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, I will punish that nation with the sword, with famine and with pestilence,” declares the LORD, ‘until I have destroyed it by his hand.’”

C. (:9-10) Avoid the Lies of the False Prophets

“But as for you, do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your dreamers, your soothsayers or your sorcerers who speak to you, saying, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon.’ For they prophesy a lie to you in order to remove you far from your land; and I will drive you out and you will perish.”

Mackay: There was a variety of ways in which the message of false hope and rebellion might be generated, but all of them were to be ignored even in foreign lands where they represented accepted practice.

D. (:11) Accept the Benefits of Oppressive Submission

“But the nation which will bring its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let remain on its land,” declares the LORD, ‘and they will till it and dwell in it.’”

Thompson: Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh’s servant, and as long as he was needed he was irresistible. His service was confined to the destruction of the things in which Israel was placing a false confidence. One day Babylon would have fulfilled Yahweh’s purpose of destroying all these things and of bringing exiles to repentance. Then he would be set aside. This was not shrewd political comment but something Jeremiah received as he stood in the council of Yahweh.

II. (:12-15) SUBMISSION = THE WILL OF GOD – COMMAND TO ZEDEKIAH TO SUBMIT TO THE YOKE OF THE KING OF BABYLON

A. (:12) Submit to God’s Plan

“I spoke words like all these to Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, ‘Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, and live!’”

B. (:13) Don’t Fight God’s Revealed Will

“Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, famine and pestilence, as the LORD has spoken to that nation which will not serve the king of Babylon?”

C. (:14-15) Don’t Embrace False Hopes

“So do not listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you, saying, ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon,’ for they prophesy a lie to you; for I have not

sent them,' declares the LORD, 'but they prophesy falsely in My name, in order that I may drive you out and that you may perish, you and the prophets who prophesy to you.'"

III. (:16-22) DELIVERANCE TIED TO DISCERNMENT – WARNING TO THE PRIESTS AND THE PEOPLE TO REJECT THE MESSAGE OF THE FALSE PROPHETS

A. (:16-17) The Lie of the False Prophets and Its Consequences

"Then I spoke to the priests and to all this people, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you, saying, 'Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house will now shortly be brought again from Babylon'; for they are prophesying a lie to you. Do not listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live! Why should this city become a ruin?'"

Feinberg: The vessels were originally made by Solomon but were doubtless added to through the years by gifts from the people (cf. **1 Kings 7:15, 23, 27, 48-50**). Some were carried away in the deportation of Jehoiakim (cf. **2 Chron 36:5-6**), and even more were carried in 597 B.C. (cf. v. **20**; **2 Kings 24:13**).

B. (:18-22) The Litmus Test for Genuine Prophets – Compare Their Agenda to God's Agenda

1. (:18) Their Agenda = What They Say Will Happen

"But if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them now entreat the LORD of hosts that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon."

Constable: If the false prophets were true, they should ask Yahweh to keep the remaining temple, palace, and city furnishings and accessories still in Jerusalem, from being taken captive to Babylon (cf. **2 Kings 25:13-17**; **Daniel 1:1-2**). The granting of their petition would validate them as authentic prophets.

2. (:19-22) God's Agenda = What God Actually Makes Happen

"For thus says the LORD of hosts concerning the pillars, concerning the sea, concerning the stands and concerning the rest of the vessels that are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take when he carried into exile Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem. Yes, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of the LORD and in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem, 'They will be carried to Babylon and they will be there until the day I visit them,' declares the LORD. 'Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.'"

Thompson: Yahweh's final word was that the accessories of the temple and the royal

palace would be taken to Babylon despite the words of the false prophets (v. 16). There they would remain until the day when Yahweh would give attention to them. Then they would be brought back and restored to their place. The chapter thus ends on a note of hope for the future. The nation stood under judgment, but beyond the judgment Yahweh promised restoration.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What should our attitude be towards the rulers that God has put in authority over us?
- 2) When have we experienced significant blessing from God in association with submitting to some form of authority?
- 3) What does this passage teach us by way of application about taking on the yoke of Christ?
- 4) How do we recognize false prophets today?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peter Wallace: Take My Yoke Upon You

In the beginning... There are only three places in the Old Testament where this construction is used. Jeremiah 26, Jeremiah 27, and Genesis 1. It's entirely possible that Jeremiah didn't think about Genesis 1, but even if he didn't, there is a strong thematic parallel between the creation of the world – with Adam having dominion over the earth and the animals – and now the Creator (note verse 5) declaring that he is giving dominion over the earth to Nebuchadnezzar.

I am struck by the remarkable coincidence of preaching these chapters of Jeremiah at the same time that I preach on the Olivet Discourse in Matthew. As we hear Jesus talk about how the destruction of the second temple will be a sign of his parousia and of the close of the age, we also hear Jeremiah talk about how the destruction of the first temple signals the undoing of creation.

1. The Yoke of Nebuchadnezzar: Learning Obedience Through Suffering (27:1-22)

a. A Word to the Nations: Serve Nebuchadnezzar, My Servant (v1-11)

The word for the word for the 'yoke-bars' that Jeremiah makes is the word for a human yoke. The more general word for yoke is used in verse 8 – “the yoke of the king of Babylon” – and that is also the word used by Jesus in Matthew 11. So don't think of an animal yoke. Think of a yoke designed for a human to enable someone to carry or pull heavy burdens. And from chapter 28, we can see that for some time Jeremiah wore this

yoke in public. It would have been a powerful image: the prophet, standing there with a symbol of slavery around his neck – calling the people – the king – even the kings of the nations! – to bow their necks to Nebuchadnezzar.

Did you notice how Jeremiah sent word to the surrounding nations? Through their ambassadors! Most of the “oracles against the nations” were prophesied to Israel. For instance, it is highly unlikely that the King of Tyre ever heard Ezekiel’s oracle in Ezekiel 26-28. It wasn’t written for the King of Tyre. It was written about the King of Tyre – but the audience was the exilic community in Babylon. While Jonah was sent to Nineveh, the book of Jonah was written to Israel. But here in verses 4-11, Jeremiah gives a message from the LORD to the ambassadors of the kings of the surrounding nations.

The language of verses 4-7 is the language of creation: “I made the earth, with the men and animals that are on the earth” – It is also the language of the Exodus (the language of redemption): “by my great power and my outstretched arm” – and the language of “my servant.” Of course, many have pointed out that the language of the Exodus is “new creation” language. But here, creation and new creation alike are given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar – “my servant.”

What does God mean by identifying Nebuchadnezzar as “my servant”? There are two parts to this. The first needs to be seen in terms of God’s regular providence. “I give it to whomever it seems right to me.” Nebuchadnezzar is God’s servant simply because he is the king. Paul will pick up on this use of the “servant” language. In Romans 13:4, Paul identifies rulers as “God’s ministers” (diakonos). (I should point out that LXX does not call Nebuchadnezzar “my servant” – the LXX says that the nations will be enslaved to Nebuchadnezzar). But the first point that Jeremiah is making is that in God’s providence, he has given the nations to Nebuchadnezzar, therefore Nebuchadnezzar is his servant by virtue of his office as King.

I mention this because we need to think of our rulers as God’s servants. Nebuchadnezzar worshipped the gods of Babylon. Nero worshipped the gods of Rome. It doesn’t matter whether they believe in the true God or not. They may even be wicked and evil men! But they are nonetheless God’s servants – because God has given these people for them to rule. I fear that we think too highly of ourselves these days. We get to vote in American elections – so we tend to think that we the people control who is king (who become President). But God says, “I give [the earth] to whomever it seems right to me.” God raises rulers up – and God brings rulers down. At least the text of Jeremiah that came to the Babylonian exiles says so!

The text that came to the Egyptian exiles omits verse 7! There is no reference to the coming judgment against Babylon. The point of the Alexandrian text (the LXX) is simply that you need to serve Nebuchadnezzar. Those who are in Babylon already serve Nebuchadnezzar. They need comfort – they need to know that their servitude has limits! We live in a world where everyone is accountable for their actions. Nations are not exempt. Empires cannot escape. God rules the world! It’s not just that God will make

all things right at the end of history. (He will – but he doesn't always have to wait!) Sometimes God makes things spectacularly right in the middle of history! God's point to the nations is that the nations will only serve Babylon "until the time of his own land comes." Every nation has its deadline. There are no exceptions. One day the United States will fall from its lofty perch. That shouldn't trouble us. If we were wise, we would start preparing for it now! Think about this way – some of the up-and-coming nations will one day surpass us. How we treat them while they are rising may have some effect on how they treat us when we are falling!

Verses 8-11 then give a warning to the nations:

If you take the yoke the King of Babylon willingly, then you may stay in your land and live. But if you refuse to serve him willingly, then I will punish that nation and destroy it by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Verses 8-11 clearly move beyond the realm of "general revelation." Yes, it is true that all kings are appointed by God. But why should the king of Edom bend his neck to the yoke of Babylon? This where God's redemptive purposes for history begin to shine forth. As we have seen earlier in Jeremiah, Judgment begins with the household of God – and if it begins with us, what will become of those who do not obey the gospel of God? (1 Peter 4) God is merciful to the surrounding nations. He had sent his servants the prophets to Jerusalem. Jerusalem refused to listen. So now, God sends word by Jeremiah to the nations: don't listen to your prophets, diviners, dreamers, sorcerers, etc. Serve Babylon and you will live. Don't resist. Don't fight against them. God is using Babylon to judge and destroy his people. Don't get in the way or you will go down with them!

Can you imagine what it would have been like to be the ambassador of Moab? You know these Jewish prophets are a thorn in the king's side. But now, here he comes to all the ambassadors as you are gathered at the palace in Jerusalem. He's wearing a yoke – and he tells you to give this message to your kings. Just imagine what Zedekiah must have been thinking!! I'm trying to negotiate with my neighbors and this renegade prophet insists on contradicting all my plans! Indeed, it appears that Zedekiah was present – because Jeremiah then turns to him:

b. A Word to Zedekiah: Submit to the Yoke of Nebuchadnezzar (v12-15)

In effect, Jeremiah says to Zedekiah, "Stop listening to prophets who prophesy lies." I pity Zedekiah. There were orthodox prophets on both sides. Some pointed to the example of godly Hezekiah: trust God and resist Babylon like Hezekiah resisted the Assyrians! But Jeremiah said "No." Resistance is futile. You will be assimilated into the Babylonian empire: either willingly – or by force.

Who do you listen to? You are the Son of David – the anointed one. You are the King of Jerusalem – the holy city. What made Zedekiah a bad king? He didn't listen to the right prophets. Of course, neither did "the priests and all the people" (verses 16-22):

c. A Word to the Priests and the People: Do Not Listen to Lying Prophets (v16-22)

Why should this city become a desolation? The "orthodox" prophets claimed that the

exile of 597 was almost over (when Jeconiah was taken into exile with Ezekiel and other leaders). The vessels of the Lord's house would shortly be brought back. The image is that of restoration from Exile. After all, if the King of Babylon allows the vessels of the temple to return, it would signify his favor toward Jerusalem and her rulers. Jeremiah says "it is a lie." You are believing a lie! If they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, then let them intercede with the LORD of hosts, that the vessels that are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah, and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon.

The word used for "intercede" in the LXX is the same word used of the ambassadors in verse 3, who had come meet with Zedekiah. If they are prophets – if the word of the LORD is with them – then send them on an embassy to Yahweh Sabaoth himself! After all, prophets are ambassadors. They speak to the people on behalf of God. And they speak to God on behalf of the people. Don't bother sending ambassadors to Nebuchadnezzar. He's not the one you need to worry about. He is the servant of the LORD – he will do Yahweh's bidding.

Your problem is not Nebuchadnezzar. Your problem is God. You need an ambassador – you need a prophet – you need someone who can intercede with God. (And you're going to send these guys?!! This is not going to end well!)

I should mention that verses 17-22 in the LXX is quite different. Verse 17 is replaced with – "I did not send them." Verse 18 omits reference to the temple vessels. Verse 19 only includes a brief reference to the vessels (omitting the detailed accounting). Verse 21 is missing – and verse 22 is replaced with "shall enter into Babylon, declares the LORD." In other words the text sent to Babylon gives greater detail regarding the temple vessels. This is not surprising – since the temple vessels were taken captive into Babylon! Further, there is no promise in the LXX. The text ends with "and they shall enter into Babylon, declares the LORD." We already saw that there was no verse 7 in the LXX. Without verse 7 and verse 22, there is no hope in this chapter! But that fits the message of Jeremiah. Jeremiah has hope for the Babylonian exiles because God is finished judging them. Those who remain in Jerusalem – and those who flee to Egypt – are running away from God. Therefore, when Jeremiah edits his text for distribution in Babylon he speaks of hope. When he edits his text for Egypt, he does not.

2. The Broken Yoke: The Peril of Prophesying Peace (28:1-17)

So Jeremiah is going around Jerusalem wearing a yoke, telling everyone to submit to Babylon. This does not sit well with the orthodox party. And so in that same year – at around the same time – Hananiah "the prophet from Gibeon" confronted Jeremiah.

a. Hananiah: Within Two Years God Will Break the Yoke of Babylon (v1-4)

Hananiah promises that within two years the vessels of the LORD's house will be returned, and Jeconiah will be restored along with all the exiles, "for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon" – the utterance of Yahweh. "Hananiah" means "Yahweh is gracious," and his message is full of grace... but alas, it is not full of truth. I have known many prophets like Hananiah. They mean well. They are orthodox – at least they

sound orthodox. They are constantly preaching “grace” – but while they may make you feel good about yourself, they do not prepare you for Judgment Day. Listen to Jeremiah’s reply:

b. Jeremiah: How I Wish That You Were Right! (v5-9)

Notice that this debate takes place before the priests and all the people. This is a public policy debate that takes place before all the leaders of Jerusalem. Jeremiah says, Well, the prophetic tradition has usually warned of war, famine, and pestilence. So by prophesying peace you stand outside of the prophetic tradition. Deuteronomy proposed a test for a prophet: does what he prophesies come to pass? So, in two years we will know whether you are a false prophet or a true one! Jeremiah appears willing to leave it there. 9 But Hananiah will not:

c. Hananiah Breaks the Yoke-Bars from the Neck of Jeremiah (v10-11)

But Jeremiah the prophet went his way. Hananiah is a bold, powerful preacher of grace. He takes the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck and breaks it – declaring “even so” will God break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar! “Peace, peace” they say – when there is no peace. Jeremiah makes no answer. He simply walks away. Sometimes that’s the right thing to do. You don’t have to have an answer all the time! And it seems clear that at the time, Jeremiah did not know what God wanted him to say. When in doubt, shut up! What would be the effect of Jeremiah’s walking away? Undoubtedly everyone thought that Hananiah had won! Hananiah had broken Jeremiah’s yoke, and Jeremiah had been unable or unwilling to reply. “Hananiah no doubt exploited that popular opinion for all it was worth and for as long as it lasted – which wasn’t long” (Wright, 286). Because sometime later (no more than a few weeks), the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:

d. Jeremiah: You Have Made This People Trust a Lie – Therefore You Shall Die (v12-16)

Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar is the new Adam. Even the beasts of the field have been given to him. God has given Nebuchadnezzar dominion over the earth. Therefore, rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar is rebellion against the LORD. In this way, Nebuchadnezzar becomes a picture of Christ. It is true that Nebuchadnezzar is a flawed and failed picture of Christ! (But if you think about it – all of them failed – if they hadn’t been flawed and failed, they would have been Christ!) The Sons of David have failed. And so God is removing dominion from the house of David and giving it to the King of Babylon, his servant. But he too will fail.

This morning we talked about the error of antinomianism. Antinomianism emphasizes grace – very much like Hananiah! But the grave danger of antinomianism is that it makes people trust in a lie. It makes people think that what they do doesn’t really matter. Sure, I should obey God, but whether I do or not doesn’t really matter. God is gracious! The LORD has never sent a prophet to say, “Hey guys, everything’s fine. You don’t need to worry about obeying God. He’s good with everything!” Jesus sent the apostles to make disciples, by baptizing the nations and by teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. A pastor who says “grace, grace” and never calls you to obedience does not understand the transforming power of grace! Shall we continue in

sin that grace may abound?! Paul asks. May it never be! How can we who died to sin continue to live in it?

Grace is far better news than that! God has triumphed over the powers of sin and death in the resurrection of Jesus. Your sin is forgiven – there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! And the dominion of sin – the power of sin over you – is broken.

The ESV leaves out the parallel in the Hebrew: “the LORD has not sent you...” “Therefore thus says the LORD: 11 “Behold, I will send you from the face of the earth.” You want God to send you – Fine. He will send you to death.

e. Hananiah (v17) In that same year, in the seventh month, the prophet Hananiah died. There is no commentary. Jeremiah does not descend into self-promotion or even condemnation of Hananiah. Hananiah had said that the exile would be over in two years. But only two months after he broke the yoke from Jeremiah’s neck, Hananiah was dead. God said it. It happened. Be warned.

Walter Brueggemann puts it well: “Jeremiah, the messenger of a hard sovereign, bears the message of stern judgment. No ideology or wishful religion can deny the intention of Yahweh in history as Jeremiah has voiced it. All the world can see is Babylonian imperialism. The community of this text, however, knows more. It knows that the real agent is not Nebuchadnezzar, visible as he is, but the God who ‘plucks up and tears down.’ And we, long after Hananiah is gone, are left with this relentless text. We are left to ponder that, in a world of raw imperial power and in a world of well-wishing religious passion, there is this other claim made upon Jerusalem and every holy operation, upon Babylon and every concentration of world power.” (255)

But into this world that is obsessed with power – into our hearts that seek to control and manipulate – Jesus says, ‘Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

Daryl Hilbert: Surrender to the Yoke

I. CONTEXT

A. Most scholars believe that chapters 27-29 are linked in background and contents. Chapters 27-28 attack the false optimism of the prophets of Judah and are dated by the majority of scholars in the fourth year of Zedekiah (594-593 B.C.). Foreign envoys were coming to Jerusalem to promote a confederacy against Nebuchadnezzar. Neighboring countries were apparently trying to involve Judah in a rebellion against Babylon, an enterprise encouraged by the false prophets at Jerusalem. The contemplated rebellion failed because of Nebuchadnezzar’s forthright action.

B. Chapters 27-29 were written to dispel the erroneous view that Babylon was just a passing power, not to be reckoned with. From Jer 51:59 we may infer that Zedekiah was called to Babylon to explain what part he had in the unsuccessful plot against

Nebuchadnezzar (EXP).

II. MAKE BONDS AND YOKES (Jer 27:1-8)

A. Reign of Zedekiah (1)

1. Some English versions follow the majority of manuscripts which read “Jehoiakim” instead of “Zedekiah” (KJV, ASV). However, this alternate view is written in the margin.

2. Older Hebrew (3), Syrian, and Arabic manuscripts read “Zedekiah.” It is suspected that Jehoiakim’s name was interpolated to sync with the context of Chapter 26. 3. Zedekiah was the last in the dynasty of the kings of Judah (597-586, total 11 yrs). He was in his fourth year of reign (594-593 B.C.) when Jeremiah’s prophecy came to him. Zedekiah was warned not to stand against Nebuchadnezzar.

B. Make Bonds and Yokes (2) –

Jeremiah was told to begin to make bonds and yokes. This was prophetic symbolism revealing that Zedekiah would be taken captive and placed in bonds. It appears that Jeremiah actually did put a yoke around his neck as seen in the presence of Hananiah (Jer 28:10- 11).

C. Send Word to the Kings (3) –

Just as Jeremiah probably did not make cups of wrath dispensing them to the kings of the land, likewise, he probably did not make yokes for each king. However, Jeremiah would have warned the kings verbally. They were the kings from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Sidon, and Jerusalem (Zedekiah).

D. Go to Your Masters (4) –

Jeremiah would have sent word to the kings through messengers (vs. 3). They were to go back to their Masters (kings) and report the word of the Lord from Jeremiah.

E. Lord Possess All Power (5)

1. The message that the envoys were to give to the kings was that the Lord is Creator and Sovereign Ruler among men. He has made everything on the face of the earth by His great power and outstretched arm.

2. The Lord’s point was that He gives His power to whomever He pleases to accomplish His purposes. The Lord will work through the righteous as well as the wicked (Pro 21:1).

F. Lord Gave Power to Nebuchadnezzar (6) –

The Lord was giving Nebuchadnezzar power over the kingdoms, inhabitants, and the wild animals. This does not suggest that Nebuchadnezzar was righteous, but He was going to be an instrument to dispense judgment upon the wicked, which included Judah.

G. Nations will Serve Him (7)

1. The Lord’s plan was that Babylon would rule for a time and all the nations

would serve it. However, after a time, other kings would rule and would make Babylon their servant.

2. Babylonian rule would last until the rule of Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, Belshazzar. Belshazzar was the son of Nitocris (Nebuchadnezzar's daughter) who married Nabonidus. Nabonidus made Belshazzar co-regent from 553-539. This is why Belshazzar was called "king" (Dan 5:1) and why Belshazzar called Nebuchadnezzar his "father," meaning ancestor (Dan 5:2, 13).

3. Babylon was captured by the Medes and Persians under Cyrus as predicted by the prophet Daniel (Dan 5:30), and the Babylonian Empire would come to an end in 539 BC.

H. A Yoke for the Anarchists (8) –

Those who resisted Nebuchadnezzar's rule will be punished by sword, famine, and pestilence. On a human level, virtually all the nations would attempt an alliance against Babylon and Babylon would defeat them. On a divine level, those who resisted Babylon were wicked nations who would be punished not for their alliances but for their wickedness.

III. STOP LISTENING TO FALSE PROPHETS (Jer 27:9-15)

A. Stop Listening to False Prophets (9)

1. Jeremiah's message to the nations was that they were to listen to the Lord and stop listening to their false seers.

2. Jeremiah listed five types of false seers. They were:

- 1) your prophets,
- 2) your diviners,
- 3) your dreamers,
- 4) your soothsayers, and
- 5) your sorcerers. These were denounced by the Lord in Deu 18:9-13.

B. They Prophesy a Lie (10) –

As all false prophets do, they prophesied lies. They were lies because:

- 1) they were not the words of the Lord,
- 2) their prophecies did not come true, and
- 3) they were drawing people away from the true God. The motive of the false prophets was to drive out the inhabitants of the land. They may not have been doing this knowingly, but that was exactly what was going to happen from the Lord.

C. Submit and Be Spared (11) –

The nations that listened to the Lord and submitted to Babylon would dwell in the land and be spared. Not only was this a gesture of mercy from the Lord to Jerusalem, but also to all the nations.

D. Zedekiah Must Submit to the Yoke (12) –

The message that Jeremiah had sent to the kings of the land was the same message that he gave to Zedekiah. If he submitted to the yoke of Babylon, Judah would be spared.

E. Why Choose the Sword? (13) –

The Lord appealed with wisdom. Why die by the sword when you can serve the king of Babylon and live?

F. Do Not Listen to Prophets (14) –

The false prophets were prophesying that the kings should not serve the king of Babylon. No one should ever listen to false prophets. As for these nations, listening to false seers would be deadly.

G. They Prophecy Falsely (15) –

Zedekiah should have known all these things about false prophets, but he was spiritually blind. He needed to be told that the false prophets were not sent from the Lord even though they prophesied in the Lord's name. Jeremiah reiterates the hidden motive (known or unknown) of false prophets, which was to drive out the inhabitants.

IV. VESSELS IN THE TEMPLE (Jer 27:16-22)

A. Warning to Priests (16)

1. Jeremiah spoke to the priests in regard to the vessels of the Lord's house. The false prophets were even declaring that the confiscated temple vessels would be returned from Babylon.

2. Some of the temple vessels had been taken under Jehoiakim's reign in the first wave of deportation in 605 BC (2Ch 36:5-7). Other temple vessels were removed under Jehoiachin's reign in the second deportation in 597 BC (Jer 27:19-20; 2Ki 24:13). The remaining vessels would be seized in Zedekiah's reign in the third and final deportation in 586 BC (Jer 27:22; 2Ki 25:13).

B. Serve Nebuchadnezzar (17) –

Though there may have been animosity against the Babylonians for removing some of the temple vessels, Judah had to submit to them. The Lord was behind the scenes attempting to get Judah to return to Him. Otherwise, the city would come to ruin.

C. Let False Prophets Entreat the Lord (18) –

True prophets would know the Lord's will through His words. The true prophets would act accordingly. In this case, they would intreat the Lord to keep the current temple vessels and not let them be taken to Babylon.

D. Remaining Vessels in Temple (19-20)

1. Three of the vessels or articles were still in the Temple and were mentioned by Jeremiah.

2. First, there were the pillars. These were columns 27 ft in height and made of bronze. They were placed in front of the Temple (1Ki 7:15-22 cf. Jer 52:17).

3. Second, there was the sea (basin). This was a large cast basin used for the washings of the priests. The basin was supported by the backs of twelve cast oxen (1Ki 7:23-26).

4. The third group of items that were still in the temple were the mobile stands upon which large lavers were placed (1Ki 7:27-37; 2Ch 4:6). The lavers were used for washing animal parts to be burned.

E. Vessels Taken to Babylon (21-22)

1. The Babylonians had not taken the last three items in their first two invasions. Perhaps because these pieces were large and not made of gold, they were left behind for the third and final invasion.

2. But contrary to the message of the false prophets, these last items would be carried to Babylon.

3. Nevertheless, in God's mercy, many of the vessels and articles that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar would be returned (cf. Ezr 1:7-11).

V. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. Listening to False Prophets

1. To underestimate the power of a lie in times of national distress is sheer folly (Feinberg).

2. Listening to false prophets can be deadly spiritually and physically. Think of those who followed false prophets and ended up in mass suicide. However, following false prophets can be just as deadly spiritually and it can happen to the masses.

3. False prophets are removing people from their spiritual ground. We talk about grounding a believer in the Word, in doctrine, and in theology. The reason is so that they are not carried away by every wind of doctrine by false teachers (Eph 4:14).

4. The other half of this truth is if one is following a false prophesy or lie, then they are not following God's word and God's will.

5. To resist the known will of God is always spiritual suicide. Feinberg

B. Surrender to the Yoke of the Lord

1. Jesus compels us to come to Him and take His yoke upon us (Mat 11:28-30). We first come to Jesus in salvation by faith in His work on the cross.

2. Then we must learn from Him and learn His Word. We learn that He is gentle and humble in heart. He has not placed us back under the Law but made us experience His grace.

3. Therefore, we ought to serve Him. We ought to take His yoke upon us. We ought to submit to Him at all times, even if we do not understand how He is working in situations.

4. We can also trust Him because He is the Sovereign Ruler among men. He will work through all situations. He will work through the righteous and the unrighteous.

TEXT: Jeremiah 28:1-17

TITLE: *DUELING PROPHETS*

BIG IDEA:

**GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN WILL PREVAIL WHEN FALSE PROPHETS
OPPOSE TRUE PROPHETS**

INTRODUCTION:

Parunak: Every old-time western, at some point or another, shows two gunslingers facing one another on the main street of town as they are about to “shoot it out” to settle some question or disagreement. The duel is an ancient form of trial, leaving the decision in the hands of God. This chapter in Jer reports such a duel, not between cowboys, but between two men who claim to be prophets: Jer and Hananiah. The question is, which of them actually represents the Lord? How can God’s people know which to believe?

There is a tremendous temptation for spiritual messengers to proclaim a message of peace and safety when the reality is that God’s judgment is coming. The Apostle Paul pointed to his commitment to proclaiming the whole counsel of God as one of the verifiable signs of his legitimate apostleship. We can never sugar-coat God’s message to try to make it more palatable or appealing. We must faithfully communicate what God has revealed.

**GOD'S SOVEREIGN PLAN WILL PREVAIL WHEN FALSE PROPHETS
OPPOSE TRUE PROPHETS**

**I. (:1-6) BREAKING THE YOKE OF BABYLON DOMINATION –
FALSE PROMISE ANNOUNCED**

A. (:1) False Prophet Introduced

“Now in the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was from Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of the LORD in the presence of the priests and all the people, saying,”

Constable: The following event took place in the same year as the preceding one, 594 or 593 B.C, in the fifth month. Another prophet, Hananiah ben Azzur from Gibeon in Benjamin (about 5 miles northwest of Jerusalem), spoke to Jeremiah in the temple courtyard, in the presence of the priests and the people who had assembled there (cf. **Jeremiah 27:16**). Ironically, the Gibeonites had deceived the Israelites in Joshua's day (**Joshua 9:1-15**), and now a man from Gibeon would again try to deceive the Israelites.

B. (:2-4) False Promise Defined = Recovery From Babylon

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,”

Claiming to be a promise from God:

1. (:2) Resolution

“I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

2. (:3) Recovery of the Vessels

“Within two years I am going to bring back to this place all the vessels of the LORD’S house, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place and carried to Babylon.”

Constable: Jeremiah predicted that the captivity would last 70 years (**Jeremiah 25:11-12; Jeremiah 29:10**), but Hananiah predicted it would last only two years.

3. (:4a) Recovery of the VIPs

“I am also going to bring back to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and all the exiles of Judah who went to Babylon,” declares the LORD,

Constable: This flatly contradicted Jeremiah’s prophecy that Jeconiah would die in Babylon (**Jeremiah 22:24-27; cf. Jeremiah 52:31-34**).

4. (:4b) Resolution Repeated

“for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.”

C. (:5-6) Facetious Response From God’s True Prophet

1. (:5) Public Show

“Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and in the presence of all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD, and the prophet Jeremiah said,”

2. (:6) Personal Preference

“Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD confirm your words which you have prophesied to bring back the vessels of the LORD’s house and all the exiles, from Babylon to this place.”

Parunak: Once again the compassion of Jer is an example for us. He longs for the well-being of his people even as he predicts their suffering. He would personally prefer the outcome presented by the false prophet; his message come, not from his own personal desires, but from the Lord. It is important for us to communicate this to those with whom we deal. It can help us to emphasize that we do not speak of our own initiative.

Ryken: Sometimes when people hear Christians speak about divine judgment they get the wrong idea. We Christians do speak about divine judgment – Hell and all the rest of it. We explain that every sin deserves the wrath and curse of God. We teach that sin

leads to death. We testify that God has reserved a place of endless torment for everyone who refuses to repent of his sins. But Christians do not talk about God's judgment because they enjoy it. The only reason we teach these things is because the Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches them in the Bible.

II. (:7-9) DISTINGUISHING THE TRUE PROPHET FROM THE FALSE PROPHET – LITMUS TEST

A. (:7) Litmus Test Introduced

“Yet hear now this word which I am about to speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people!”

B. (:8) Litmus Test Contextualized

“The prophets who were before me and before you from ancient times prophesied against many lands and against great kingdoms, of war and of calamity and of pestilence.”

Just because Jeremiah has spoken of calamity doesn't brand him as wrong or in error.

C. (:9) Litmus Test Defined

“The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet comes to pass, then that prophet will be known as one whom the LORD has truly sent.”

“I will believe it when I see it”

Parunak: Speaking as a prophet of the Lord, he delivers a one-two punch.

1) 8, Precedent indicates that messages of judgment have a good prophetic pedigree. Human sin being what it is, most of the prophetic air-time is dedicated to warning of judgment. Even the good news, the gospel, only makes sense once we understand the bad news.

2) 9, The rules of Deut. 13, 18 permit Jer to adopt a “wait-and-see” attitude. He need not argue this through theoretically; Han's prophecy is sufficiently precise that Jer is content to rest on the Lord's decision.

III. (:10-11) BREAKING THE YOKE OF BABYLON DOMINATION – FALSE PROMISE ACTED OUT

A. (:10) Visual Object Lesson From the False Prophet

“Then Hananiah the prophet took the yoke from the neck of Jeremiah the prophet and broke it.”

Constable: Hananiah proceeded to deliver a symbolic act of his own by vandalizing Jeremiah's sign. He dramatically smashed the yoke that Jeremiah had been wearing on his neck (cf. **Jeremiah 27:2**). He claimed that, similarly, within two years Yahweh would break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar off the neck of all the nations that he was oppressing.

B. (:11a) Verifiable Prophecy

“Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, ‘Even so will I break within two full years the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the nations.’”

This would be a popular message with the people – but Hananiah is digging his own grave with such a specific promise

C. (:11b) Violent Reaction Resisted – Vengeance Belongs to God

“Then the prophet Jeremiah went his way.”

Jeremiah did not feel the need to lash out and attack Hananiah despite how he had taken the yoke off him and broken it. He left matters in the hands of the Lord. Nothing more to be said at this point. Let’s see how history unfolds

Ryken: This parting of the ways must have required great restraint on the part of Jeremiah. After all, Hananiah laid angry hands on him. Breaking the yoke was an act of aggression that could easily have led to further violence. . . There is spiritual wisdom in knowing when to walk away from a dispute.

Mackay: This is the action of a man who on meeting with implacable opposition realizes the futility of speaking further. Having made his case, Jeremiah was content to let events prove who was in reality the prophet of the Lord.

IV. (:12-17) REALITY OF BABYLON DOMINATION – FALSE PROPHET DENOUNCED

A. (:12-14) Defining the Object Lesson on God’s Terms

1. (:12) Authentic Word from the Lord

“The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after Hananiah the prophet had broken the yoke from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, saying,”

2. (:13) Intensification/Strengthening of the Imagery

“Go and speak to Hananiah, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, You have broken the yokes of wood, but you have made instead of them yokes of iron.’”

Kidner: We only add to God’s chastening when we resist it – exchanging wood for iron.

3. (:14) Yoke of Babylon Domination Cannot Be Broken

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they will serve him. And I have also given him the beasts of the field.’”

Longman: The reference to *wild animals* is best to be understood as prophetic hyperbole. Wild animals, after all, are wild and thus virtually impossible to subjugate. If he can control the wild animals, he will easily control the inhabitants of these nations, including Judah.

Feinberg: Whereas for Hezekiah to resist Assyria in 701 B.C. was an act of faith, for Judah to rebel against Babylon in Jeremiah's time was an act of disobedience.

B. (:15-16) Denouncing Hananiah as a False Prophet

1. (:15) Hananiah Exposed

“Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, ‘Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie.’”

Adam Clarke: This was a bold speech in the presence of those priests and people who were prejudiced in favor of this false prophet, who prophesied to them smooth things. In such cases men wish to be deceived.

2. (:17) Hananiah Executed

“Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This year you are going to die, because you have counseled rebellion against the LORD. So Hananiah the prophet died in the same year in the seventh month.’”

Constable: The prophet who predicted deliverance in two years died in two months. God graciously gave him two months to repent before He put him to death. His death was another object lesson to the people on the importance of obeying God's Word.

Mackay: One might wonder why it [the death] did not happen immediately. Would that not have given even greater authentication to Jeremiah and his message? Perhaps it is a sign of graciousness allowing Hananiah time to reflect and repent. Perhaps it allowed Hananiah's death to occur in a way that showed it was from the Lord and not humanly contrived whether by Jeremiah or anyone else.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why are false prophets so brazen in their false claims when history will reveal their deception?
- 2) What type of pressure do God's messengers face from those who desire to hear only positive words of hope and victory?
- 3) When is it appropriate to use object lessons and visual aids and illustrations as a teaching device?

4) How does prophecy demonstrate God's absolute sovereignty over the events of history?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Mackay: Who was really relaying the message of the Lord? How could the people tell? Indeed, a first glance at the two protagonists might well seem to favour Hananiah as the more creditable party. He was a respectable figure with the support of the most influential circles in the land, whereas Jeremiah was an outsider, an eccentric, and dressed with a yoke around his neck so that it was difficult not to question his sanity as well as his orthodoxy. It was not easy for the people to determine where the truth of the matter lay in this classic confrontation of prophet against prophet. In the end the Lord intervened directly to provide conclusive verification of Jeremiah's status and to punish the impostor Hananiah; but even then the people were not prepared to listen.

Longman: Jeremiah knows that prophets are typically not in the business of bringing exclusively good news. After all, they are covenant lawyers, that is, they are the ones God sends to his people when they have broken their covenantal obligations and run the risk of bringing the curses of the covenant on themselves. It is true that prophets do speak words of hope. Even Jeremiah himself has words of restoration (see chapters 30-33). However, the difference is that this hope follows judgment and repentance.

Daryl Hilbert: Opposing the Prophecies of Hananiah

CONTEXT

A. Chapter 28 continues without a break in the narrative of chapter 27 (cf. the phrase "in the same year" [28:1]), which shows that Jeremiah was still wearing the yoke.

B. Again, there are some divergences between the Hebrew text (MT) and the Greek (LXX). The chapter tells about the confrontation of the prophets Jeremiah and Hananiah. (EXP)

I. HANANIAH PROPHECIES FREEDOM FROM BABYLON (Jer 28:1-4)

A. Hananiah's Prophecies (1)

1. These events took place in the same year as in the previous chapter (Jer 27:1). The fourth year was in the beginning of Zedekiah's first half of an eleven-year reign (597-586 BC). The fifth month would come into play at the end of this chapter (Ch. 28).

2. There was a prophet by the name of Hananiah. He was identified as the son of Azzur. According to one source, an unprovenanced (not from an official dig site) bulla had been found with the inscription, "Belonging to Hananiah son of Azariah" and is in the Museum of Western Asiatic Antiquity, Berlin.

3. He was also identified as coming from Gibeon. Gibeon is now an Arab

village by the name of Al-Jib (el-Jib) and is approximately 1 mile north of Nebi Samwil, the home and burial place of the prophet Samuel. Some have postulated that Nebi Samwil is the “high place of Gibeon” in Scripture (cf. 1Ki 3:4-5). In biblical history, the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into making a treaty with them. Later, the Israelites were forced to defend their ill-made ally and defeated five Canaanite kings (Joshua 9 and 10).

4. Hananiah falsely prophesied in the house of the Lord to the priests and people.

B. Prophecy #1 - The Yoke of Babylon is Broken (2)

1. Hananiah was one of the prophets who was saying that the Lord has broken the yoke of the Babylonians.

2. In other words, Judah did not need to submit to Nebuchadnezzar because he was about to be removed from power by the Lord.

C. Prophecy #2 - All Vessels Would be Returned (3)

1. In fact, it was Hananiah who was one of the prophets that prophesied the temple vessels would be returned in two years (cf. Jer 27:16).

2. God said He would return some of the vessels, but it would be after Judah’s seventy-year exile (Jer 27:22 cf. Jer 25:11; 29:10).

3. However, the vessels would be taken by Nebuchadnezzar and they would not be returned in two years as Hananiah prophesied.

D. Prophecy #3 - Jeconiah and Exiles Would Return (4)

1. Hananiah also prophesied that Jeconiah and the exiles would be returned. This prophecy was false because God had specifically said that Jeconiah and his mother would die in exile (Jer 22:24-26 cf. Jer 52:31-34).

2. In addition, Hananiah falsely prophesied that Babylonian’s yoke and empire would be broken in two years.

II. HANANIAH OPPOSED BY JEREMIAH (Jer 28:5-9)

A. Jeremiah’s Prophecies (5)

1. Perhaps Jeremiah did not wish to be in a position where he had to oppose the would-be prophet (Hananiah) in front of the priests and people.

2. However, having been given his prophecies from God, Jeremiah could not remain silent. He had no other choice but to confront the false prophecies, so as not to mislead the people.

B. May the Lord Return the Vessels (6)

1. Jeremiah’s statement may seem out of character. He was giving hearty assent

to the idea of the vessels and exiles returning in two years.

2. Jeremiah himself would have wished that that could be the case. However, he knew that it was not God's will to do those things.

3. Furthermore, Jeremiah previously stated that a true prophet would be praying for the repentance of the people and the return of the temple vessels (Jer 27:17-18).

C. Past Prophets Prophesied Calamity (7-8)

1. In a different tone, Jeremiah began to prophesy God's word. Therefore, he admonished the people to listen carefully to what he had to say.

2. Prophets are not to be motivational speakers or those who promise to never speak a negative word. They are to be the mouthpiece of the living God and His word.

3. Jeremiah argued that the prophets who were before him all spoke against lands and great kingdoms. They spoke of war, calamity, and pestilence.

4. Of course, that is not all of which they spoke. They did speak of the joy of the Lord in obedience, imminent protection, and the future kingdom. But the two go hand in hand.

D. A Prophet's Words Must Come to Pass (9)

1. Jeremiah on the one hand posed a challenge similar to Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel.

2. If Hananiah was a true prophet sent from God, then there would be peace and the exiles would return from captivity.

3. Jeremiah was stating the two litmus tests for the words of prophets:

- 1) Their words must not rebel against the will of the Lord (Deu 13:1-5).
- 2) Their prophecies must come to pass (Deu 18:20-22).

4. Hananiah failed both tests. While God desired submission to Nebuchadnezzar, Hananiah prophesied rebellion (cf. Jer 27:17; Jer 28:2). While God predicted exile and captivity, Hananiah prophesied peace.

III. HANANIAH BROKE JEREMIAH'S YOKE (Jer 28:10-11)

A. Hananiah Took Off Jeremiah's Yoke (10)

1. Hananiah is called a prophet some six times (Jer 28:1, 5, 10, 12, 15, 17). The title "prophet" was a title that Hananiah gave himself. Evidently, some in Judah believed his fabrications.

2. In a bold and presumptuous gesture, Hananiah removed Jeremiah's yoke from around his neck.

B. Hananiah Affirmed the Broke Yoke (11)

1. Hoping to give credence to his false prophecies, Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yoke in the presence of all the people.

2. This was a simulation of what he thought and declared was going to happen to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. 3. Now that Hananiah made his prophetic claim, Jeremiah, who had already given the litmus tests for prophets, simply went his way.

IV. HANANIAH PROVOKED YOKES OF IRON (Jer 28:12-17)

A. Hananiah Made Yokes of Iron (12-13)

1. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah after Hananiah had taken his final stand and broke the yoke around Jeremiah's neck.

2. The message was that because Hananiah broke Jeremiah's yokes of wood, Hananiah had made yokes of iron instead.

3. [...T]he people were exchanging the wooden yoke of submission [to Nebuchadnezzar] for the inflexible iron yoke of servitude in [Babylonian captivity] (EXP).

B. The Lord Put Yokes on All the Nations (14)

1. The Lord's iron sovereignty cannot be broken by man.

2. Nebuchadnezzar would be the Lord's hand of judgment on all the nations.

C. Jeremiah Accused Hananiah of Lying (15)

1. Jeremiah accused Hananiah of not being sent by the Lord and of causing the people to trust in a lie (false prophesy).

2. His false prophecies influenced the people toward the iron yoke of captivity.

D. The Lord Pronounced Death on Hananiah (16)

1. There is a play on words in vss. 15-16. Because the Lord had not "sent" (shalach - send) Hananiah, therefore, the Lord would "remove" (shalach - send away) or send him away, i.e. die.

2. He failed the litmus test because a true prophet does not counsel rebellion against the LORD and His word.

E. Hananiah Died the Same Year (17)

1. The people would have had to have waited two years to see that Hananiah was not a true prophet and that his prophecy would not come true.

2. However, they only had to wait two months (seventh month) to see Jeremiah's prophecy be fulfilled.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. God's Word is not always Positive

1. Joel Osteen began his ministry by declaring that you will never hear a discouraging word from his pulpit. Being positive is what Joel Osteen's ministry is all about.

2. On a CBS Sunday Morning Interview on March 27, 2016 Joel Osteen was asked, "You've been criticized for church-lite, or a cotton candy message. Do you feel like you're cheating people by not telling them about the Hell part? Or repentance part?" she asked. "

3. No, I really don't, because it's a different approach, Osteen replied. You know, it's not hellfire and brimstone. But I say most people are beaten down enough by life. They already feel guilty enough. They're not doing what they should do raising their kids we can all find reasons, he said. So, I want them to come to Lakewood or our meetings and be lifted up, to say, You know what? I may not be perfect, but I'm moving forward. I'm doing better. And I think that motivates you to do better (CBS Sunday Morning on March 27, 2016).

4. Jeremiah teaches us that we must be willing to say the truth no matter how negative it is or whether people want to hear it or not. Was Jeremiah guilty of church-lite or a cotton candy message? I think not.

5. I realize that God's Word is not all negative and I praise Him for that. But when was it delegated to men behind pulpits to decide for themselves to preach only positive sections of Scripture? Paul preached the whole counsel of God (Act 20:27).

B. False Teachers bring judgment (cf. Jer 28:13-14)

1. Moonwalking is apparently a means God uses to exorcise demons and bring deliverance. At least that's what I'm observing from the antics of Prophet Joshua Holmes. In a video he recently posted to Facebook, in which it looks like he obtained the remnants of Michael Jackson's wardrobe, he's seen providing deliverance to someone. He delivers a swift air punch to the man needing deliverance, then he slowly moonwalks away.

2. There is nothing in scripture that indicates air punches or moonwalks are sacraments or a means of delivering God's power. What can we conclude from that fact? Mostly that Prophet Joshua Holmes is a showman who is using his deliverance ministry to live out his childhood fantasy of mixing Michael Jackson's stage presence with his conman grifter gig he has as a false prophet (Heterodox Research Initiative).

3. Though we may get a smirk out of this article, the state of affairs in Christianity today is perilous.

4. Jeremiah's lesson still applies; false prophets not only falsely prophecy (lie),

but they also bring judgment upon those who follow them.

Parunak: This illustrates a common biblical principle, that those who plot evil against others will eventually be trapped by their own devices. In ch. 26, it was the priests and prophets who insisted, *“This man is worthy to die”* (26:11). Now one of their own number falls instead, at Jer’s word.

1) **Pro 26:27** *“Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.”*

2) **Psa 7:15** *“He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made.”*

3) **Psa 9:15** *“The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken.”*

4) **Psa 35:7-8** *“For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul. Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his destruction let him fall.”*

5) **Psa. 57:6** *“They have prepared a net for my steps; my soul is bowed down: they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen themselves. Selah.”*

TEXT: Jeremiah 29:1-32

TITLE: *TOUGHING IT OUT IN TOUGH TIMES*

BIG IDEA:

OPPRESSED BELIEVERS MUST REJECT FALSE PROMISES AND PURSUE GOD'S WILL WHILE CLINGING TO FUTURE HOPE

INTRODUCTION:

Sometimes God's people find themselves in unpleasant and oppressive circumstances. In the case of the Jews exiled for the 70 year Babylonian Captivity, it was a matter of divine discipline for their rebellion and idolatry. You can imagine the types of negative and discouraging thoughts that must have plagued them as day in and day out they longed for the prosperity and privileges they had known before in the Promised Land.

In other historical examples, the oppression might not be sin-related. Certainly Christians find themselves today living in a culture that opposes a biblical worldview and the righteousness of God. How can we please God in such circumstances and endure the suffering and discouragement of such bleak times? There is no magic bullet that is going to provide instant deliverance. God's kingdom agenda includes enduring suffering while continuing to walk by faith. The temptation is to look for a quick fix and be led astray by attractive false promises of prosperity and relief.

OPPRESSED BELIEVERS MUST REJECT FALSE PROMISES AND PURSUE GOD'S WILL WHILE CLINGING TO FUTURE HOPE

Mackay: The community in exile was facing a crisis in their faith and in their personal circumstances. How should they react to the trauma of deportation? Were they to treat their present circumstances as temporary, or should they settle down for a long stay? . . . Often in crisis situations it is the optimistic word of a speedy resolution that seems to be called for, but optimism that is not based on divine revelation is pernicious and delusive. By engendering false hopes it leads to greater problems in the long run. Blind optimism is never the true answer to human catastrophe; only a reaction based on the word of God will provide the genuine answers that are needed. In thinking through their dramatically changed circumstances of exile, the community was not to be beguiled by the alluring voices of a false resolution, but was rather to learn to hear and respond correctly to the message that comes from God.

I. (:1-14) THE GAMEPLAN FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING IN OPPRESSIVE CIRCUMSTANCES (ADDRESSED TO THOSE IN EXILE IN BABYLON)

(:1-3) Particulars Regarding Jeremiah's Instructions to the Exiles

1. (:1) Author and Recipients

"Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the

prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.”

2. (:2) Historical Reference Point

“(This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.)”

3. (:3) Letter Carriers – Delivery Service

“The letter was sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, saying,”

Parunak: the means by which the letter was sent. Zechariah was sending diplomatic mail to Nebuchadnezzar, and Jer's letter hitch-hikes along in the diplomatic mail-pouch.

A. (:4-7) Prescription for Successful Living in Exile – Focus on Doing God’s Will in Your Present Circumstances

1. (:4-5) Work Responsibly to Provide for Essential Needs

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, ‘**Build** houses and **live** in them; and **plant** gardens and **eat** their produce.’”*

- Shelter – build, live
- Food – plant, eat

These can seem like mundane responsibilities. But we have the opportunity to please God in our daily living.

Mackay: Crisis of faith – had the Lord let them down and deserted his people? Could they really rely on the covenant promises? The assertion that it was God who had controlled their destiny is made to assure them that they have not been forgotten, and that they play a particular part in the divine purpose. They were where they were by divine initiative and control (**24:5**); they had a future. Nebuchadnezzar was merely the agent whom the Lord had used to carry out his purposes. They should accept their circumstances, because the Lord was in control of them. . .

The mention of gardens rather than fields probably indicates that they were unable to acquire extensive land-holdings, but as tenants would have been allotted plots of ground in the vicinity of their houses.

2. (:6) Grow Your Families

“Take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease.”

The blessing of family is independent of our wealth and financial opportunity and cultural domination.

3. (:7) Pursue Peace and Divine Favor

“Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare.”

We must understand how God’s sovereignty over the nations is administered through the authority structures He has established. We need to seek the peace of the city where He has placed us. We need to bloom where we have been planted. Always longing for where the grass is greener robs us of the opportunity to serve God in our present surroundings.

Parunak: The exhortation takes the form of a series of commands, each emphasizing a longer duration for the captivity than the preceding.

- a) **5a**, Build shelter--it will be longer than a few days.
- b) **5b**, Plant gardens--it will be longer than the growing season.
- c) **6**, Marry and propagate--it will be longer than a generation.
- d) **7**, Seek the peace of Babylon, for it is tied up with your own peace. Does not imply any horizon at all.

Application: This letter is a good guide for us on our pilgrimage. Our home is the heavenly Jerusalem; we are presently living in the enemy's land, a planet whose god is Satan. Yet God does not call us to live as hermits, or in constant rebellion against the social structures of our culture. We, like the captives of old, must "seek the peace of Babylon," even as we bear witness against her errors and refuse to participate in her sins.

B. (:8-9) Prophecy of Deception Must Be Rejected – False Prophets Only Offer False Hope and Deceive

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream. For they prophesy falsely to you in My name; I have not sent them,’ declares the LORD.”

You can’t be suckered by false promises and assurances of safety and deliverance when the tough times call for endurance and perseverance.

You must make sure you are getting your spiritual direction from the proper sources.

C. (:10-14) Promise of Restoration – Focus on Future Hope of Divine Favor and Restoration

1. (:10-11) Future Agenda

- a. (:10) Restoration After 70 Year Subjugation

“For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word

to you, to bring you back to this place.”

b. (:11) Providential Masterplan

“For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

What a tremendous perspective – to understand that God is for us and working on our behalf. We have a bright future. We need to cling to that hope.

Mackay: This is the essence of the divine message for those in exile. A shaft of light pierces the gloom of their present situation when the Lord says he has plans for their future. But realization of these plans was contingent upon their attitude. They were called to exercise faith without the accompaniments of Temple, sacrifice and sacred city, which the people had previously so identified with true religion that they had lost sight of the need to trust simply in God. He would deliver them, but on his time scale and not the one that they considered to be appropriate. The passing of the years would tend to encourage among them a right disposition towards the Lord, one of obediently waiting on his will, as opposed to the automatic claim they thought they had on his blessing.

2. (:12-14) Seeking and Finding

a. (:12-13) Wholehearted Seeking After God

“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 search for Me with all your heart.”

b. (:14-15) Restoration Back in the Promised Land

“I will be found by you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.”

Parunak: The mechanism of the return: God will first incline the people's heart toward him, so that they seek him, and then he will restore them in response to their quest. Each of **vv. 12, 13-14a** depicts this sequence of seeking the Lord and his gracious response.

Note that this is not a condition, "If you seek me, then you shall find me," but a continued prophecy of what will happen after 70 years. Our faith is itself a gift of God, under his sovereign control.

Application: God exercises his sovereign control through our real decisions and actions. The doctrine of his control should encourage us in our efforts for him, not tempt us to do nothing.

Constable: Since the exiles did not seek the Lord wholeheartedly, and since He did not return all of them to the land at the end of the Exile, premillennialists look for a fulfillment of these promises in the future. [Note: See **Kaiser**, pp110-12; and **Feinberg**, p555.] The returns from exile under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah were only partial fulfillments of these promises. Most of the exiles chose not to return (e.g, Mordecai and Esther). Perhaps others of them could not return (e.g, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego).

II. (:15-20) THE GRIM DESTINY OF THOSE REMAINING IN THE LAND OF JUDAH SHOULD GET THE ATTENTION OF THE EXILES

You think you have it rough – consider the destiny of those who refused to submit to the Lord’s discipline – Learn the lessons from history

(:15-17a) Discernment Problem

1. (:15) Listening to the Wrong Prophets

“Because you have said, ‘The LORD has raised up prophets for us in Babylon’— “

2. (:16) Learning the Consequences of Their Disobedience

“for thus says the LORD concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who did not go with you into exile—”

Kidner: In Babylon it was tempting for the first main wave of exiles to pin their hopes on the fact that, after all, Jerusalem was still intact, still inhabited, and possessed of the temple and a Davidic king. In Babylon too, as at home, there were prophets (**15**) stirring up these sentiments. So the truth about the homeland and the truth about these prophets had to be told.

3. (:17a) Listening to the Prophecy From the Lord

“thus says the LORD of hosts,”

A. (:17b-18) Destiny of Death and Destruction

1. (:17) Destiny Proclaimed – Round 1

a. (:17b) Calamities of Death and Destruction

“Behold, I am sending upon them the sword, famine and pestilence,”

b. (:17c) Catastrophic Impact

“and I will make them like split-open figs that cannot be eaten due to rotteness.”

2. (:18) Destiny Proclaimed – Round 2

a. (:18a) Calamities of Death and Destruction

“I will pursue them with the sword, with famine and with pestilence;”

- b. (:18b) Catastrophic Impact
“and I will make them a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a curse and a horror and a hissing, and a reproach among all the nations where I have driven them,”

Talk about the Grim Reaper

B. (:19-20) Application: Watch and Learn

1. (:19) What Happens When You Fail to Listen and Obey

“‘because they have not listened to My words,’ declares the LORD, ‘which I sent to them again and again by My servants the prophets; But you did not listen,’ declares the LORD.”

2. (:20) Command to Listen and Obey

“You, therefore, hear the word of the LORD, all you exiles, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.”

**III. (:21-32) THE GULLIBILITY IN EMBRACING DECEPTION
NECESSITATES THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FALSE PROPHETS**

A. (:21-23) Curse Against Ahab and Zedekiah

1. (:21a) Identification

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying to you falsely in My name,”

2. (:22-23) Indictment

“Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will slay them before your eyes. Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, ‘May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire, because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors’ wives and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness,’ declares the LORD.”

Kidner: Marks of false prophets:

- incitement to serve other gods (even when it was supported by signs and wonders and true predictions, **Dt. 13-5**)
- predictions that failed (**Dt. 18:20-22, cf. Je. 28:9**)
- indulgent preaching (**Je. 23:17, 32**)
- and here, immoral living (**29:23**)

B. (:24-28) Rebuke of Shemaiah

“To Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,’”

1. (:25-26) Arrogant Attack

“Because you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who are in Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, and to all the priests, saying, ‘The LORD has made you priest instead of Jehoiada the priest, to be the overseer in the house of the LORD over every madman who prophesies, to put him in the stocks and in the iron collar,’”

Constable: "The irony is that Zephaniah would, according to **Deuteronomy 28:34**, become a madman himself when he witnessed the judgment coming upon Jerusalem." [Note: **Scalise**, p79.]

Feinberg: The background of Shemaiah’s letter is clear. Jeremiah’s letter understandably angered the false prophets in Babylon. Shemaiah, who was one of them, wrote the deputy priest Zephaniah to silence Jeremiah. Instead, Zephaniah read Shemaiah’s letter to Jeremiah, who replied in a message predicting the doom of Shemaiah for denying Jeremiah’s authority (v. 27). The false prophets had apparently overlooked the promises Jeremiah had given (vv. 10-14).

2. (:27-28) Sarcastic Suggestion

“now then, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who prophesies to you? For he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, ‘The exile will be long; build houses and live in them and plant gardens and eat their produce.’”

C. (:29-32) Punishment of Shemaiah

“Zephaniah the priest read this letter to Jeremiah the prophet.”

1. Identification

“Then came the word of the LORD to Jeremiah, saying, ‘Send to all the exiles, saying, Thus says the LORD concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite,’”

2. Indictment

“Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, although I did not send him, and he has made you trust in a lie, therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am about to punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants; he will not have anyone living among this people, and he will not see the good that I am about to do to My people,’ declares the LORD, ‘because he has preached rebellion against the LORD.’”

Longman: Because he has falsely prophesied, God will punish him and his descendants. He will not live to see the future day of salvation, the good things God will do for his

people. Precisely what those good things are is the subject of the next section of the book of Jeremiah, the so-called Book of Consolation (**chs. 30-33**).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this passage help deter us from thinking that the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence?
- 2) When have we had difficulty submitting to difficult circumstances that God has brought into our life?
- 3) What are some of the deceptive messages of peace and safety that false prophets are proclaiming in today's context?
- 4) What encouragement do you take from the assurance that God has a plan to bless you in the future?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: The sections (:4-23) form a pattern **AB C AB**:

- a) A: The peace of Babylon (**4-7**) contrasted with the desolation of Jerusalem (**16-19**).
- b) B: Rejection of false prophets (**8-9, 20-23**).
- c) C: A test showing that Jer is right and they are wrong (**10-15**).

Mackay: The letter that follows is given in substance rather than verbatim, as the absence of the opening address customary at this period indicates. It is in two parts: **vv. 4-14** focus on the problem of the duration of the Exile, while **vv. 15-20**, after raising the question of false prophets, digress in **vv. 16-19** into discussing the prevailing situation in Jerusalem, before resuming the principal theme in **v. 20**.

Wiersbe: How should we handle such a depressing situation? Accept it from the hand of God (**v.4**) and let God have His way. It does no good to hang our harps on the willow trees and sit around and weep, although this may be a temporary normal reaction to tragedy (**Ps. 137:1-4**). One of the first steps in turning tragedy into triumph is to accept the situation courageously and put ourselves into the hands of a loving God, who makes no mistakes.

Peter Wallace: Seek the Welfare of the City

How do you live in the midst of a culture that despises your religion? A couple weeks ago we sang Psalm 137 – “how shall we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?” We need to remember that our home is the heavenly Jerusalem. Our citizenship is in

heaven. Any earthly citizenship must be used for the benefit of the heavenly city.

As the Epistle to Diognetus put it, for the Christian, “every foreign land is a home land – and every home land is a foreign land.” Or as Jeremiah said: “seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” In other words, pray for the peace of Babylon!

Of course, Shemaiah (and others of the exiles) would prefer singing Psalm 137 – “Blessed be the one who dashes their children’s heads against the rock!” How can we pray for the peace of Babylon? Don’t we long for Babylon to be destroyed? Yes – and no. Or, more precisely, No, and Yes! For 70 years, no we do not long for Babylon to be destroyed. We pray for its peace. But when the time comes for Babylon to be destroyed we will rejoice in its destruction! Let’s look at how this works:

Introduction: The Letter to Babylon (v1-3)

Notice first who takes Jeremiah’s letter – it is Zedekiah’s two ambassadors to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon:

1) Elasah the son of Shaphan – in chapter 26 we heard about Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, who protected Jeremiah from the anger of King Jehoiakim. Now another son of Shaphan serves as courier for Jeremiah.

2) Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah – Hilkiyah was the name of the high priest under King Josiah – so it is likely that this is the son of the high priest Hilkiyah. Shaphan and Hilkiyah were now both dead, so probably Gemariah’s brother was high priest, and Elasah’s brother is chief scribe (we’ll hear about another son of Shaphan who serves as scribe in ch 36).

Ambassadors in those days were trusted palace officials, so it would make sense to send the brothers of the high priest and the chief scribe. Shaphan and Hilkiyah had served the faithful king, Josiah. Now their sons are attempting to negotiate the challenging times that followed. Three sons of Josiah – and one grandson – have sat on the throne of David, all in a span of 15 years. Shallum was taken captive to Egypt – and is now probably dead. Jehoiakim died in the siege of 597. His son, Jeconiah, was taken captive to Babylon three months later. And now his uncle Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah sits on the throne.

We are not told what mission Zedekiah gave to these messengers, but plainly their arrival in Babylon will cause the exiles to get their hopes up. If Nebuchadnezzar is engaging in negotiations with Zedekiah, maybe we will be able to go home soon. God calls Jeremiah to crush their hopes. If your hope is focused on what you will get in this life – then God wants me to crush your hopes! Because God has a better plan!

1. How Do You Live When You Are in Exile? (v4-14)

a. You Are Not Coming Home Yet, So Seek the Welfare of Babylon (v4-7)

God had called Jeremiah to tear down and to build up; to uproot and to plant. So far, Jeremiah has mostly done the tearing down and uprooting. Now he begins to plant. Now we begin to move from judgment to hope. But not as quickly as the Exiles would

like to hear it!

Twice in verses 4-7 God says “I have sent you into exile.” Don’t blame Nebuchadnezzar. I did this. The LXX even goes so far as to delete the name of Nebuchadnezzar from this chapter. You know, that king over there in Babylon – whatever his name was... His name isn’t important! Yahweh Sabaoth – the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel – now there is a name that matters! “I have sent you into exile.”

Now in order for this to sink in, let me remind you what has happened. The people who are hearing this letter endured a siege in 597 – a siege that resulted in the death of their king – a siege that saw countless of their friends and relatives killed, and the rest of the leadership of Jerusalem marched off to Babylon. They had to walk nearly a thousand miles. Remember that the kingdom of Judah was approximately the size of St. Joe and LaPorte counties put together. And now you have walk to Dallas, Texas – or Orlando, Florida. 4 And God says, “I have sent you into exile.” This is my doing.

I realize that we don’t like to think that God is the one who brings bad stuff into our lives. But I want you to think about the alternative: if it was just Nebuchadnezzar – then that means that God failed to protect you; if it was just cancer – then that means that God couldn’t (or worse, wouldn’t) do anything about it.

A friend of mine lost his daughter in a car accident. He says that the sovereignty of God brings comfort to him – because that must mean that God had something better in mind. In the middle of the pain it’s hard to imagine how it could be “better.” After watching your friends die, and walking a thousand miles to Babylon, the city that has always been opposed to God! – it’s hard to see how this is part of God’s “great plan”! Indeed, when you are hanging on a cross, bearing the sin of the world on your shoulders, it is entirely appropriate to say, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!” And we’ve heard that throughout Jeremiah! The message of hope that we hear in chapter 29 comes after the misery and pain of 28 chapters! But there is a message of hope! God says that he has a plan. And right now, exile is where God has called you to be.

Now, let’s be clear: Babylon is not Jerusalem. Jerusalem is your true home. But you cannot live in Jerusalem right now. God calls you to live in Babylon. And not just “live” there, but to seek the welfare of Babylon. The peace of Babylon. The word is “shalom.” Seek the shalom – the peace – the well-being of Babylon. For in its peace you will find your peace. You are to do in Babylon all the things that you would do in the Promised Land: “build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit; 5 take wives and have sons and daughters... multiply there, and do not decrease.” God has turned the world upside down! All your life you have prayed for the peace of Jerusalem – so say the Psalms (Psalm 122:6) – but now Jeremiah says “pray for the peace of Babylon!”

The history of salvation moves from Babylon to Jerusalem. In Genesis there is the tower of Babel – and then Abraham is called to leave the region of Babylon and come to the Promised Land. Abraham himself will be called to offer Isaac on the same

mountain where Jerusalem will later be built. All of God's promises to Abraham were fulfilled in David and Solomon. At least, that's what Israel had thought. But as the sons of David did not practice righteousness and justice – and as the temple in Jerusalem was defiled by idols – the day had come when God would push the “rewind button” on the history of salvation.

And now redemptive history runs backwards as God sends his people into exile in Babylon – except for those who voluntarily return to Egypt (yeah, like that's a better idea!) From the beginning of the Bible, Babylon is the city that is most diametrically opposed to the LORD. But now your peace will be found in the peace of Babylon! Your welfare – your well-being – is tied to the well-being of Babylon. The New Testament will regularly identify “Babylon” as the city of man – the earthly city – the kingdoms of this age. The power structures of this age are properly called “Babylon.”

This doesn't mean that Christians cannot serve in government! After all, Daniel and his friends served the governments of Babylon and Persia! Just remember that the government of the United States – the government of South Bend – the government of every earthly city – is properly called “Babylon.” You should pray for the peace of Babylon. You should seek the welfare – the well-being – of the city where God has placed you. But never forget that it is Babylon! 6 It is not the city of God. Yes, at present it is the city where God's people live – and so therefore we pray for the peace of Babylon. But the future of God's people is always Jerusalem. But so long as you live in Babylon – for so long as you live in this age – as sojourners and exiles in Babylon – pray for the peace of Babylon.

This is why Paul teaches us to pray for rulers. Remember how Paul says it? “I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Tim 2:1-2) And Paul goes on to say that we pray for rulers in this way because God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth – which happens more easily when rulers allow Christians to live a peaceful and quiet life. Pray for the peace of Babylon – for the well-being of Babylon. But do not put your hope in Babylon! You see, this is the irony of Jeremiah 29: what is the lie that the prophets believe?

b. Do Not Be Deceived by the Prophets Who Prophecy Lies (v8-9)

The prophets are saying that Nebuchadnezzar will restore Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar will end the exile. Nebuchadnezzar will let us go home! Ironic, eh? Jeremiah is allegedly the one who has “sold out” to Nebuchadnezzar, because Jeremiah has told the people not to resist Nebuchadnezzar. But now the very prophets who rejected the word of Jeremiah are telling Israel to put their hope in Nebuchadnezzar!

This happens all the time! If you confuse America with Jerusalem – 7 and so you think that God's purposes for the salvation of the world are bound up with America – then you will always be looking for a political salvation. But if you recognize that America (and China, and Iran, and Germany, and Russia) and all the nations of the earth, are

Babylon – then you may seek the welfare of the city, without expecting Babylon to save you!

You can be a Daniel – serving in high political office in Babylon – indeed, when Jeremiah’s letter arrived in Babylon it is likely that Daniel would have been one of the first to read it – since he was attached to the court of Nebuchadnezzar at this time! Why does Daniel live the way he does? Because he understands and believes Jeremiah’s letter. (And Daniel 9 makes reference to the “books of Jeremiah” – so plainly Daniel is familiar with Jeremiah’s letters!).

The apostles take the same sort of approach to living in the Roman empire – even going as far as comparing Rome to Babylon! And this is why verse 11 is one of the most well-beloved verses in the book of Jeremiah:

c. “I Know the Plans I Have for You” – in Seventy Years (v10-14)

We recognize that this speaks to the current situation of the church! In verse 11, Jeremiah returns to the theme of shalom. “I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for shalom and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” God’s purpose for his people is not “disaster” but “peace.” Not “evil” but “well-being.”

Notice that what comes first is God’s plan and purpose which then result in Israel calling upon the LORD. God’s purpose will not be thwarted. God’s gift of shalom cannot be earned. But shalom is also the calling to which we are called. As Paul says, “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us...” (Romans 5:3-5)

Okay, so far I’ve high-lighted the parallel between Jeremiah 29 and us today. But I also need to point out the difference: Pay attention to verses 12-14: Yes, there are similarities between the exiles in Babylon and us. But there is a huge difference! The exiles must wait 70 years until God will hear them. Only then may they draw near to God in his holy sanctuary. You, on the other hand, may draw near to God right now. The difference between the Exiles and the Church is Jesus. In the ascension of Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father we now have an advocate who has entered the Holy of Holies. The King has passed through exile and death and he has been exalted to the right hand of God, triumphing over sin, death, and the devil. Your fortunes have already been restored! The exile is over! At least, it is over for Jesus – and therefore (by faith) for us! But by sight the exile is not yet over. We do not yet see all things under Jesus’ feet.

2. How Should You Think about the “Lucky” Ones Who Are Not in Exile? (v15-23)

a. The Remnant in Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed (v15-19)

Verses 16-20 are especially interesting. As we’ve gone through Jeremiah, I have frequently made reference to the two texts of Jeremiah – the Babylonian text (sent with Seraiah, the brother of Baruch – see chapter 51), and the Alexandrian text (taken with Jeremiah and Baruch). Chapter 29 contains an interesting example of the difference.

What we have in our English Bibles is the Babylonian text. The Alexandrian text is pretty much the same – except it omits verses 16-20. This is curious because this is quoting a letter that Jeremiah wrote years before. It appears that Jeremiah omitted this from the manuscript that he took to Egypt. Why? Look down at verses 16-20. This is where Jeremiah tells the Babylonian exiles that God will make the Jerusalem remnant a horror. But the Alexandrian manuscript is written for the Jerusalem remnant. It appears that Jeremiah (or Baruch) left out verses 16-20 because this information is not necessary for the Jerusalem remnant.

Think about what this does to the chapter! In the Alexandrian manuscript, the entire focus is on the Babylonian exiles. The Babylonian exiles are exhorted to seek the welfare of the city – and warned not to listen to false prophets. The effect of the text for the Jerusalem remnant is a parallel exhortation: if you are going to Alexandria (in Egypt) then you, too, need to seek the welfare of the city. But in the Babylonian manuscript, there is also a condemnation of the Jerusalem remnant, which is then applied to the Babylonian exiles: do not be like the Jerusalem remnant! In other words, both manuscripts use the other group as a warning to the intended audience. Both manuscripts faithfully apply the message of Jeremiah to God's people.

And that is now my task – as I seek to apply the message of Jeremiah faithfully to you. Because Jesus is now the King who sits on the throne of David. He endured exile – he became “a curse, a terror, a hissing, and a reproach” – for the joy set before him – he endured the cross, scorning its shame. Some have wrongly assumed that this means that because Jesus endured this, therefore we don't have to! It would be more accurate to say that because Jesus endured this therefore we follow him – with the confidence that because Jesus was raised from the dead, we too will be raised up to newness of life!

There is a joy that we find in the midst of suffering! But it is still suffering! We walk by faith – not by sight. Unless of course, we are false prophets! John will speak of the false prophets in his day – that they went out from us because they were not of us. There are false prophets in the church today. And you identify them today the same way that Jeremiah did!

b. The Curse upon the False Prophets (v20-23)

Verses 20-23 give us a couple of easy signals: “they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives, and they have spoken in my name lying words that I did not command them.” An adulterer is a false prophet. Jeremiah could have added other similar sins (think about the list that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 6:9 – “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”) A man who does such things cannot be a pastor. I have heard some people say that such a man can sympathize with sinners better. No. Jesus sympathizes with us – because he was tempted in all ways as we are – yet without sin! We sympathize best with sinners when we persevere – 11 when we endure – through temptation. But it is not enough to avoid temptation. A preacher must guard his life and his doctrine.

3. The Peril of Making People Trust in Lies (v24-32)

a. Shemaiah's Letter to the Priests in Jerusalem (v24-28)

Verses 24-32 summarize the ongoing correspondence between the exiles in Babylon and the remnant in Jerusalem. Shemaiah was one of the leading prophets of the exiles in Babylon. When Jeremiah's letter came to the exiles, he was furious! And so he wrote to the high priest, Zephaniah, demanding that Zephaniah lock up Jeremiah. And so Zephaniah read this letter in the hearing of Jeremiah the prophet. Perhaps Zephaniah was sympathetic to Jeremiah – or maybe he just wanted to give everyone a fair hearing. Either way:

b. Jeremiah's Reply (v29-32)

We don't know anything more about Shemaiah. What happened to him and his family? We have no idea. And that's the point. Jeremiah the prophet is known throughout all history as a faithful prophet of the LORD. The only thing we know about Shemaiah the prophet is that he was wrong. Shemaiah is upset with Jeremiah because Jeremiah has "sold out" to Babylon. Ironically, Shemaiah's hope rests on the good favor of Babylon – in order to send the exiles home.

And there will be times when the church has "sold out" to Babylon. There is always a danger that we will get too comfortable – that we will forget our true home. But there is another – perhaps greater – danger. And that is that we will fail to obey Jesus. Jesus calls us to "seek the welfare of the city." Christians should be chief among the benefactors of the cities where they live. Think of what Hope Ministries has done for downtown South Bend. We saw in Matthew 25 that Jesus focuses his attention on "the least of these my brothers" – because we are to focus first on our fellow Christians – but if we seek the peace – the well-being – of the city where we live, then we will "do good to all men – especially those of the household of faith."

I like Christopher Wright's comment: "Jeremiah was under no illusions. Babylon itself stood under God's judgment and its time would come. But that was true of all nations and all the earth, and it still is. The role of God's people in the midst of such reality is still to pray for and seek the welfare of the people they live among, even when we are aware that people in every nation and culture stand under God's judgment." (p295)

Daryl Hilbert: Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles

PART 1

I. CONTEXT

A. The historical situation of the chapter was that in 597 B.C., some three thousand Jews had been exiled with Jehoiachin, among them a number of priests and prophets along with the royal household.

B. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah heard that some exiled false prophets were predicting an early fall of Babylon and an early restoration of the exiles to Judah. Jeremiah's letters warned the exiles against this deception and urged them to wait patiently for God's time (Feinberg).

II. THE FIRST LETTER TO THE EXILES (Jer 29:1-14)

A. Jeremiah's Letter to the Exiles (1)

1. Even though Hananiah was no longer a threat for Judah after his demise (Jer 28:16-17), three other false prophets were addressed by Jeremiah.

2. The three false prophets mentioned among the exiles were Ahab the son of Kolaiah (Jer 29:21), Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah (Jer 29:21), and Shemaiah the Nehelamite (Jer 29:24). They were in part, the occasion for Jeremiah's letter.

3. This was the first letter recorded in the Bible (Feinberg). There were numerous letters written in the OT (2Ch 21:12-15; 30:1, 6-9; 32:17; Ezr 4:7-8, 11; 5:6; Neh 2:8-9; 6:5).

4. There were numerous types of written communication in antiquity. They were papyrus (reeds), parchment (animal skins), wooden tablets, clay tablets, and ostraca (potsherds). Though each of these have been discovered in Israel, Jeremiah most likely wrote on either papyri or parchment (cf. Jer 36:2, 4).

B. After Second Deportation (2)

1. The timeframe was given as sometime after King Jeconiah was taken into captivity. This was the second deportation from Judah to Babylon in 597 BC.

2. Taken into exile along with Jeconiah was the queen mother, officials, craftsmen, and smiths.

C. Letter Sent Along with Officials (3)

1. The letter was given to emissaries of king Zedekiah. They were Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah.

2. Most likely, they were traveling to Babylon with King Zedekiah's regular tribute money.

D. Addressed to the Exiles (4)

1. The message of the letter was from the Lord of Hosts.

2. The letter was expressly addressed to the exiles taken to Babylon from Jerusalem.

E. Build Houses (5)

1. The exiles were told to settle in and begin to build houses and gardens.

2. Instead of expecting to return to Jerusalem anytime soon, they were to settle in and begin to build their lives.

F. Take Wives (6)

1. In the same manner, they were to take wives and bear children. Of course, they were not to take foreign wives (Deu 7:3).

2. Their long captivity should not limit their lives or increase.

G. Pray for Babylon's Welfare (7)

1. They were to do everything they could for the "welfare" (shalom - peace or soundness) of Babylon's success. The more Babylon succeeded the more those in captivity would succeed.

2. In fact, Judah was to pray to the Lord on behalf of Babylon's success. Later on, King Cyrus would ask for the prayers of the people (Ezr 6:10).

H. Do Not Listen to False Prophets (8)

1. However, if Judah was to prosper during captivity, then they must reject the message of the false prophets.

2. They were not to listen to these false prophets, diviners, and dreamers (cf. Jer 27:9). Diviners were those who claimed to consult with beings or things to find out the future. Dreamers were those who claimed to receive divine dreams.

I. False Prophets Were Not Sent (9)

1. The Lord reiterated that these false teachers were not sent by Him.

2. They were self-proclaimed prophets (cf. Rev 2:2).

J. Exiles Return in Seventy years (10)

1. Hananiah prophesied that the exiles would return in two years (Jer 28:3). There were more false prophets making the same false prophecy.

2. The Lord said He would bring the exiles back to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it would not be until Babylon was removed from power in seventy years (cf. Jer 25:11-12).

3. Seventy years was the timeline that the Lord gave to Jeremiah in which He would visit His people, release them from captivity, and bring them back to Jerusalem.

4. Some maintain that the seventy years of captivity were between 586-516 BC, concluding the rebuilding of the Temple. Others hold that the seventy years were between 606- 536 BC, concluding with the decree of Cyrus to release Judah.

K. Lord Gives Future Hope (11)

1. The sovereign Lord had plans for His people and He would carry them out. These were plans of welfare and not calamity.

2. The Lord offered a future restoration and hope to Judah.

L. Judah will Call Upon Lord (12)

1. It would precipitate a response from Judah in which they would call upon the Lord.
2. Following Judah's repentance, the Lord would listen to them.

M. Judah will Seek Lord (13)

1. They would seek the Lord with all their heart and find Him.
2. Their relationship would be restored with the Lord.

N. Lord will Gather Israel (14)

1. The Lord would restore to them their previous fortunes which they had in the promised land. In addition, the Lord would gather His people from all the nations.
2. Fulfillment would occur in the era of Ezra and Nehemiah, and beyond this in even fuller measure after the Second Advent of their Messiah (cf. Dan. 2:35, 45; 7:13, 14, 27; 12:1-3, 13) (MSB).

III. THE SECOND MESSAGE TO THE EXILES (Jer 29:15-19)

A. Judah Still Embraced False Prophets (15)

1. Some claim this was a second letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles. It very well may have been, since it seems to include a response from the exiles.
2. They did not heed the first warning but raised up prophets in Babylon who would oppose Jeremiah's prophecy.

B. Address to Kings and People (16)

1. The exiles may have had a false confidence since a king (Zedekiah) continued to sit on the throne of David.
2. In addition, not everyone from Judah was in captivity. There were still people and brothers who dwelled in Jerusalem.

C. Sword, Famine, and Pestilence (17-18)

1. As for the king and those who remained in Jerusalem, impending judgment would come upon them.
2. The Lord promised the three-fold calamity of divine punishment. It was the sword, famine and pestilence.
3. Those who still remained in Jerusalem were like rotten figs which could not be eaten. In other words, there was no hope that those who remained in Jerusalem would repent. Judgment upon them was inevitable.

D. They Refused to Listen (19)

1. Those remaining in Jerusalem rejected God's word, warning, and offer.
2. They rejected God's prophets over and over. This was a sad repetitive theme in Jeremiah (Jer 25:3; 26:5; 32:33).

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. We observe God's discipline to His people.

B. We observe God's grace and mercy to His people.

C. We observe God's displeasure with false prophets.

PART 2

I. THE LETTERS

A. First Letter from Jeremiah (Jer 29:1-14)

1. A letter was sent from Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (Jer 29:1-4).
2. The message was four-fold:
 - a. The exiles were told to flourish in Babylon (Jer 29:5-7).
 - b. The exiles were warned against listening to false prophets (Jer 29:8-9).
 - c. The exiles were promised to be released in seventy years (Jer 29:10).
 - d. The exiles were given a future hope from the Lord (Jer 29:11-14).

B. Second (possible) Letter from Jeremiah (Jer 20:15-28)

1. There is some debate about this next section (Jer 29:15-28) as to whether it is included in the same letter or is possibly an additional letter.
2. Favoring an additional second letter, there are differences between vv. 4-14 and vv. 15-19 that appear too strong to be the same letter.
 - a. The first set of verses (4-14) appear to be sympathetic to the exiles. They also have nothing to say about the king Zedekiah.
 - b. The second set of verses (15-) include a rebuke to the exiles for apparently dismissing the first letter and claiming they have prophets in Babylon (Jer 29:15).
 - c. Furthermore, there was a pronouncement of judgement against king Zedekiah for listening to the false prophets (Jer 29:16-19).
 - d. Another major difference between the two apparent letters was the detail concerning three of the false prophets. In fact, all three false prophets were named: Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah (Jer 29:20-28).

C. Letter Sent by Shemaiah (Jer 2:25)

1. The Scriptures state that Shemaiah sent "letters" to the people posing as a prophet.

2. Sometimes “letters” (sêpherim, plural) in the plural form can refer to a single communication [cf. 2Ki 19:14] (Harrison). It apparently refers to only one letter (cf. Jer 29:29).

3. Nevertheless, Shemaiah’s letter was in response to Jeremiah’s first letter who had written, “The exile will be long; build houses and live in them and plant gardens and eat their produce” (Jer 29:28 cf. Jer 29:5).

D. Third (possible) Letter from Jeremiah (Jer 29:31-32)

1. After Jeremiah’s first letter, Shemaiah responded with his own letter. Apparently, he attempted to get Zephaniah the priest and the people to rebuke Jeremiah for being a madman and a false prophet.

2. Jeremiah, under the Lord’s direction, wrote another letter to the exiles specifically concerning Shemaiah and his lies (Jer 29:31).

3. Zephaniah the priest read Shemaiah’s letter to Jeremiah.

E. Conclusion

1. It is clear that Jeremiah wrote more than one letter. It is possible that he wrote three.

2. If we include Shemaiah’s letter, it is possible that there was a total of four letters in this chapter.

II. THE FALSE PROPHETS AHAB AND ZEDEKIAH (Jer 29:20-23)

A. Address to Exiles (20)

1. The phrase “you, therefore” suggests that v. 20 is a continuation of vv. 15-19 (Jeremiah’s second letter).

2. The Lord admonishes the exiles to hear the word of the Lord and to listen to Him.

3. The Lord declares that He was the one who sent Judah into exile. The irony was that Judah was sent into exile because they did not listen to the Lord in the first place.

B. Two False Prophets (21)

1. The Lord names two of the false prophets. They were Ahab the son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah.

2. Little is known about these prophets. However, the Lord would use them as object lessons to warn all other false prophets.

3. They were prophesying falsely in His name, which means they were not receiving revelation from the Lord. Instead, they were lying and fabricating prophecies that would be acceptable to the people.

4. These two false prophets would die in accordance with the Law in Deu 13:5 and Deu 18:20. However, it would be through the hand of Nebuchadnezzar and probably for treason (Feinberg).

5. All the exiles would see these false prophets slain before their eyes. The Lord was weeding out the false prophets and authenticating Jeremiah, His true prophet.

C. They Would Become a Curse (22)

1. The death penalty for these men would be death by fire. This was a common method of capital punishment among the Babylonians (cf. Dan 3:6, 20, 23). The Persians preferred punishment by death in the lion's den (cf. Dan 6:7, 12, 16, 19, 20, 24, 27).

2. The death of these two prophets would become a curse. The curse was, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire."

3. Feinberg suggests a play on words with "Kolaiah" (Qōlayah), "curse" (qelalah), and "roasted" (qalah). It might be something akin to, "May you get 'burned' like 'Bernie!'"

D. They Were Immoral (23)

1. In addition to prophesying falsely in the Lord's name, these men acted "foolishly" (nebalah - senseless and disgraceful). They were immoral, and they habitually committed adultery with their neighbors' wives (Exo 20:14; Lev 20:10; Pro 6:32; Mat 5:27-28).

2. Though these sins may have been done in secret, the Lord knew about their sin and was the witness against them.

III. THE FALSE PROPHET SHEMAIAH (Jer 29:24-28)

A. Shemaiah's Letter (24-25)

1. Shemaiah the Nehelamite, of whom nothing is known outside of Jeremiah, was rebuked by the Lord for writing a letter against Jeremiah and his prophecies.

2. The letter was written to Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah, who was a priest (Jer 21:1), and to all the priests. It was also addressed to the people in Jerusalem.

B. Zephaniah Should Punish Madmen (26)

1. Though commentaries vary in their assessment of this verse, most likely, Shemaiah was challenging Zephaniah by reminding him that he had been made a priest by the Lord. Zephaniah was to imitate his illustrious past predecessor, Jehoiada the priest, who had taken bold actions against those who threatened the royal line [2Ki 11:1-20 cf. 2Ki 12:2] (Longman).

2. Zephaniah was to clear the Lord's house of prophets, who were actually madmen. They were to be put in stocks and in iron collars.

C. Zephaniah Should Rebuke Jeremiah (27)

1. Shemaiah was claiming that Jeremiah was a madman. According to Shemaiah, Jeremiah's prophecies were lunacy.

2. If Zephaniah would have been doing his duties properly before the Lord, he would have rebuked Jeremiah.

D. Zephaniah Should Refute Jeremiah's Prophecy (28)

1. Jeremiah's insane prophecies were the prophecies that the Lord had given him. In essence, Shemaiah was claiming that the Lord was insane.

2. They were the prophecies Jeremiah mentioned in his first letter concerning building houses and planting gardens during the seventy years of exile (Jer 29:5, 10).

IV. JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY AGAINST SHEMAIAH (Jer 29:29-32)

A. Zephaniah Read the Letter to Jeremiah (29-31)

1. Zephaniah, the son of Maaseiah, who was with the priest Pashhur (Jer 21:1), apparently accepted Jeremiah's prophetic authority and read Shemaiah's letter to Jeremiah.

2. It appears that Jeremiah was instructed to write another letter to the exiles. The Lord had denounced Shemaiah as a lying prophet whom the Lord did not send.

B. Shemaiah would Perish in Exile (32)

1. The Lord's judgment upon Shemaiah was that neither he nor his family members would be among those who would be delivered from exile.

2. Shemaiah, who prophesied that the exiles would soon be released, would die in exile. The final judgment against Shemaiah was that he preached rebellion against the LORD.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. False Prophets Cater to People but not the Lord

1. The false prophets mentioned in Jeremiah 28 and 29 (Hananiah, Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah) did not seek or care about the Lord's will. Instead, they only told the people what they wanted to hear.

2. Certainly, Christians are to care about people, but they must preach the truth of God's word whether it is popular or not.

3. Paul warned about a time when some would tickle the ears of people instead of preaching the Word (2Ti 4:2-4).

4. Paul himself was not a people-pleaser in the sense of giving them only what they wanted to hear, especially when it came to the gospel (Gal 1:8-10).

B. Loose Theology Accompanies Loose Morality

1. Since the false prophets in Jeremiah's day were serving themselves and not the Lord, they were only one step away from serving their fleshly appetites.

2. No one is free from the temptation to sin. Unfortunately, sin finds its way into all ranks of all religions.

3. However, there is a common connection with bad theology and bad morality. Often times, when theology is tailored to suit the individual, morality is also tailored to suit their appetites.

4. Peter wrote about the immorality of false teachers (2Pe 2:13-15 cf. Rev 2:14).

5. We often hear about would-be false teachers and false prophets who end up in immorality. When they compromise biblical theology, they often compromise themselves in biblical morality.

TEXT: Jeremiah 30:1 – 31:1

TITLE: PROMISE OF RESTORATION FOR ISRAEL AND JUDAH

BIG IDEA:

DESPITE THE GLOOM OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY, AND THE TERROR OF THE COMING TRIBULATION, FUTURE RESTORATION WILL HEAL ALL WOUNDS

INTRODUCTION:

This passage, as with many of the OT prophecies, has a near fulfillment in the return from the Babylonian Captivity with ultimate fulfillment in Israel's final restoration in the end times after the Great Tribulation. Jeremiah's tone thus far has been largely one of judgment. But now in this Book of Consolation, **chaps. 30-33**, we see the bright light of God's intended future blessing for His covenant nation – the combined and restored northern and southern kingdoms. **The promises of God are both surprising and magnificent** – surprising in light of the manifold iniquities of God's people and magnificent in their breadth and scope of peace and prosperity.

DESPITE THE GLOOM OF THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY, AND THE TERROR OF THE COMING TRIBULATION, FUTURE RESTORATION WILL HEAL ALL WOUNDS

I. (:1-3) THEME: PROMISE OF FUTURE RESTORATION IN THE PROMISED LAND

(:1) *“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,”*

A. (:2) Scriptural Permanency

“Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book.’”

Parunak: God is going to reverse his former judgments, by bringing them back to the land. Because this will happen a ways down the road, he wants the record preserved so that, when it happens, people will recognize it as the hand of God and not just political happenstance.

B. (:3) Specific Promise

“‘For behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah.’ The LORD says, ‘I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.’”

The connection to the Promised Land makes it difficult to spiritualize this verse and apply it to the church of Jesus Christ; was this completely fulfilled in the return from the 70 year Babylonian Captivity or does it have end times implications?

Parunak: Specifically, he will bring them back to their land and give it back to them. Note the emphasis on the land! It is central; the other blessings are secondary. To apply this to God's blessings on the church, which omit the land entirely, is completely backwards.

Mackay: “*restore the fortunes of*” – occurs 7 times in the Book of Consolation (v. 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26). . . to effect a reversal of divine judgment and a restoration of the people to a state of well-being and prosperity. This is a more general concept than release from captivity and involves reinstatement in covenantal favour (29:14), often including divine action to correct what had led to the imposition of judgment (Bracke 1985:243). . . While the land provided the people with national identity and political integrity, its significance primarily derived from the fact that it was the arena of covenant blessing, the place where God's presence and spiritual bounty would be enjoyed.

II. (:4-9) PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE FROM YOKE OF BONDAGE

(:4) “*Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah:*

A. (:5-6) Fear and Hopelessness Dominate

“For thus says the LORD, ‘I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see If a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale?’”

Parunak: The metaphor here compares the suffering of the exile with the pain of childbirth (v.6), in contrast with the triumph of the resurrection that God will bring in the future (v.9). Two modes of attaining to life, one painful, the other gloriously free of pain.

Longman: the fear is so great, even on those strong men who would be responsible for providing military defense that they would act like a woman experiencing labor pains. Their emotion is also etched on their face since fear causes their face to go pale.

B. (:7-9) Freedom From the Yoke of Oppression

1. (:7) Reversal – From Great Distress to Great Salvation

“Alas! for that day is great, There is none like it; And it is the time of Jacob's distress, But he will be saved from it.”

Unprecedented horrors identified here – nation has experienced nothing of this severity previously

Parunak: What historical event is in view?

a> **Dan. 9:27** foretells a seven-year period ("one week") during the second half of which (3.5 years) Jerusalem will be desolated. This is placed AFTER the

coming of Messiah.

b> **Matt. 24:14ff** gives further temporal precision; it refers to Daniel's period AFTER the evangelization of the entire world, and describes it as an unprecedented "great tribulation."

c> Revelation picks up the 3.5 year figure (**11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5**) and describes the coming sufferings in great detail.

2. (:8) Release – From the Yoke of Oppression

“It shall come about on that day,’ declares the LORD of hosts, ‘that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves.’”

3. (:9) Reorientation -- to Serve God and King David

“But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.”

Liberation is not freedom from governance but freedom to serve God and His appointed righteous ruler

Parunak: Who is the David here? Is the reference here to David the individual? To his house? Or to Messiah? The answer will probably depend on whether you understand these promises to refer to the Jewish restoration, spiritually to the church, or to a future restoration of Israel on earth.

Constable: Instead of suffering captivity, the Israelites would serve their God and David their king, whom the Lord would raise up for them. This probably refers to a successor to David rather than King David himself (cf. **Jeremiah 23:5; Isaiah 55:3-5; Ezekiel 34:23-25; Ezekiel 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5**).

III. (:10-11) PROMISE OF SECURITY AND SALVATION

A. (:10) Security – Do Not Fear

“Fear not, O Jacob My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘And do not be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar and your offspring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, and no one will make him afraid.’”

B. (:11) Salvation – Enjoyment of Divine Presence

“For I am with you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly and will by no means leave you unpunished.’”

Parunak: The verse contrasts Israel's discipline with God's dealings with the other

nations. He will exterminate the nations entirely. His dealings with Israel, by contrast, are described in three statements, a positive between two negatives. Each has application to us in God's dealings with us when we sin.

1) He will not make a full end of Israel. The nation will endure before him. Confirmed in spite of amazing trials, through history.

Application: Even so, the believer will never be swept away by God's wrath.

2) He will "*guide [them] toward the right*" (not "correct in measure," cf. **Isa. 28:26**). The point is that he has a purpose in their chastisement, something to teach them. This is the difference between chastisement and punishment: chastisement is intended for improvement; punishment, to bring justice and revenge.

Application: This is the point of **1 Cor. 10:13**. "*A way to escape*" is literally, "an outcome," which I take to be the purpose or issue of the chastisement.

3) He will not leave them unpunished. Quotation from **Exod. 34:6,7**, the tension between God's mercy and justice; the enduring effects of sin, even after forgiveness.

Application: **Gal. 6:7,8**, God's harvest law. God is not mocked.

IV. (:12-17) PROMISE OF RESTORATION TO FULL HEALTH AND PUNISHMENT OF ISRAEL'S ENEMIES

"For thus says the LORD,"

A. (:12-13) Incurable Wound – Beyond Recovery

*"Your wound is incurable
And your injury is serious.
There is no one to plead your cause;
No healing for your sore,
No recovery for you."*

Constable: Yahweh had inflicted His people with a wound from which they could not recover because they had sinned greatly. No one could intercede effectively for them because the Lord had determined to punish them. Israel's political allies had forsaken her and would not help her. Even crying out would not help them.

B. (:14-15) Iniquities to Blame – No Excuses – No Surprise

*"All your lovers have forgotten you, they do not seek you;
For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy,
With the punishment of a cruel one,
Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous.
Why do you cry out over your injury?
Your pain is incurable."*

*Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous,
I have done these things to you.”*

C. (:16) Imprecation Against Adversaries

*“Therefore all who devour you will be devoured;
And all your adversaries, every one of them, will go into captivity;
And those who plunder you will be for plunder,
And all who prey upon you I will give for prey.”*

D. (:17) Intervention by God to Bring Healing

*“For I will restore you to health
And I will heal you of your wounds,’ declares the LORD,
‘Because they have called you an outcast, saying:
It is Zion; no one cares for her.’”*

Kidner: the emphasis in verses **12 and 15** on what is incurable and indefensible is preparing us for the paradox of verses **16-17**, where God turns the tables on the enemy and retrieves the irretrievable, doing all this for his own honour – “for he will not have it said of his people and his city that no one cares (17) for them!

Mackay: the contempt of the nations for Zion also slighted the Lord of the covenant and the adequacy of his provision, being based on the misconception that judgment had befallen the Lord’s people because he was incapable of defending them from the onslaughts of their adversaries. In fact he had been acting in furtherance of his own purposes, and now he intervenes to reverse his judgment and vindicate his name (**Isa. 62:12**).

V. (:18-22) PROMISE OF RESTORED IDENTITY AS THE BLESSED PEOPLE OF GOD

A. (:18) Restoration

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city will be rebuilt on its ruin, and the palace will stand on its rightful place.’”

B. (:19-20) Blessing and Prosperity

1. Celebration

*“From them will proceed thanksgiving
And the voice of those who celebrate;”*

2. Significance

*“And I will multiply them and they will not be diminished;
I will also honor them and they will not be insignificant.”*

3. Standing

“Their children also will be as formerly,

And their congregation shall be established before Me;”

4. Vindication

“And I will punish all their oppressors.”

C. (:21) Leadership

*“Their leader shall be one of them,
And their ruler shall come forth from their midst;
And I will bring him near and he shall approach Me;
For who would dare to risk his life to approach Me?” declares the LORD.”*

Kidner: The idyllic picture of verses **8ff**, is now filled out with detail, not only in terms of regaining all that had been lost (**18-20**) but of something new: a ruler one of themselves, who will be what no king had ever been allowed to be: their mediator and priest (**21**). It is one of the boldest but least-known messianic prophecies (for this ruler is clearly the “*David*” of v. **9**).

D. (:22) Identity

*“You shall be My people,
And I will be your God.”*

Cf. **Hosea 1:9; 2:23**

VI. (:23-24) PROMISE OF THE OUTPOURING OF DIVINE WRATH

A. (:23) Divine Wrath Overwhelms the Wicked

*“Behold, the tempest of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a sweeping tempest;
It will burst on the head of the wicked.”*

B. (:24a) Divine Wrath Accomplishes God’s Purposes

*“The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and
until He has accomplished the intent of His heart;”*

C. (:24b) Divine Wrath Targets the End Times

“In the latter days you will understand this.”

Constable: The people did not understand this prophecy fully when the prophet first gave it, but they would in the far distant future. Similarly, God told Daniel to seal up his prophecy because it was not time for His people to understand it yet (**Daniel 12:4; Daniel 12:9**).

(31:1) TRANSITION – IDENTITY STATEMENT REPEATED

*“‘At that time,’ declares the Lord, ‘I will be the God of all the families of Israel,
and they shall be My people.’”*

Cf. **vs. 22**

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How would you contrast an amil approach to this chapter to a premil approach?
- 2) What comfort and security do we take from God's presence and our identity as His people?
- 3) Why does God include the theme of retribution on Israel's enemies in this positive promise regarding the future of His covenant people?
- 4) What can we learn about the special leader – the coming Messiah of the house of David – the prophet/king/priest -- from this passage?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Overall structure of this section (30-33)

- a) **30:1-3** appears to be a heading to the entire section.
- b) **30-31** are poetry; **32-33** are prose. Each has two parts; the vision break at **31:26**, and the strong IF at **33:1**.
- c) Four strong themes are repeated throughout this section.
 - 1) Reiteration of the land's sin and the agony of suffering imposed on the people for it.
 - 2) Restoration of the society and its relations.
 - 3) Focus on a new covenant between God and Israel.
 - 4) Promises grounded in the order of creation. . .

Theological significance: This is probably the single most important passage in the Bible for determining one's eschatological position. It predicts that God will bring Israel back to her land, to live there forever under a new covenant. Thus it is foundational to the millennial perspective. Recall the three options for the restoration passages:

- a) Reference to Zerubbabel--but this restoration is to be forever, not just until 132 AD.
- b) Spiritual reference to the church--but this completely misses the emphasis on the land, which is central to Jeremiah's whole point.
- c) The final option is that God will one day restore the nation to its land, in belief and obedience. This has always been the Jewish expectation. Furthermore, it was the dominant Christian teaching during the first three centuries. Only after the so-called "conversion" of Constantine, when the church felt that it at last had its temporal power

on earth, did amillennialism become dominant, through the influence of Augustine.

Daryl Hilbert: Restoration After Jacob's Distress

I. CONTEXT

A. Expositors generally agree that chapters 30-33 constitute a group of prophecies. The section has been called "The Book of Consolation" (Feinberg).

B. [Jer 32:1] gives us the historical background of these prophecies (cf. Jer 33:1). Jerusalem was in the final period of an eighteen-month siege by the Babylonians. Other Judean cities had already capitulated to them. The temporary intervention of Egypt (cf. Jer 37:45) failed to stem the tide of events, and Jerusalem remained disillusioned and helpless. The remarkable feature of chapters 30-33 is that, though written during a time of deep distress for Jerusalem, they foretell a glorious future for the nation (cf. the latter part of 1:10). Up to this point in the book, Jeremiah's prophecies have mostly been threatening and gloomy, despite some bright glimpses (cf. Jer 2:13; 3:14-17; 16:14-15; 23:18; 24:47). Now in chapters 30-33 the prophetic outlook changes (ibid.).

II. RESTORATION PROMISED (1-3)

A. The first three verses serve as a prologue for the coming chapters (30-33). Again, it was not Jeremiah's own opinion, but the revealed word of the Lord to him (1).

B. The God of Israel has something to say to Israel (and Judah) and He wanted Jeremiah to record it in a book. This would end up being a portion of the entire book of Jeremiah (2).

C. The Lord began with the phrase, "behold, days are coming" (3). This is a prophetic announcement of eschatological times (Jer 7:32; 9:25; 16:14; 23:5; 31:27, 31, 38; 33:14; 48:12; 49:2; 51:47, 52). Some prophetic announcements in Jeremiah have been about judgment (Jer 7:32; 9:25; 49:2). Some prophetic announcements have been about deliverance (Jer 16:14-15; 23:5). However, since this section (chapters 30-33) contains five prophetic announcements of restoration (Jer 30:3; 31:27, 31, 38; 33:14), it has been called, "The Book of Consolation."

D. The Lord summarizes His announcement with the restoration of the fortunes of His people. Though the kingdom was divided, the Lord would unite His people Israel (northern kingdom) and Judah (southern kingdom). This was a theme in Jeremiah (Jer 3:18; 23:6), especially in chapters 30 through 33 (Jer 30:3; 31:27, 31; 33:7, 14). They will possess the land of their forefathers.

III. JACOB'S DISTRESS FOR A TIME (4-11)

A. Lord's Words for Israel and Judah (4) - Israel and Judah would be restored to a united kingdom. However, before that took place, they would both experience a time of distress. The cause of their distress was that their sins were numerous (Jer 30:15).

B. Lord Heard Terror and Dread (5) - The Lord began with a poetic (heard) and prophetic message that His people will be besieged with terror and they will have no

peace.

C. Like Pain of Childbirth (6) - The Lord poses a dramatic question, “can [a male] give birth?” The men will clutch their thighs in anguish from the destruction of the enemy. They will assume a position similar to a woman in childbirth and will become pale with dread.

D. Time of Jacob’s Distress (7) - The tribulation in that day will be great. There will not be another day like it. It is a distress (tsarah - narrow or confined) that is designed for Jacob (Israel).

1. Interpretations - There are several interpretations of this and especially of the phrase “Jacob’s distress.”

a. Some believe it is referring to the immediate situation of the Babylonian’s final invasion. This is a prominent interpretation and cannot be excluded from any of the views. However, we might say that the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians pales in comparison to the Great Tribulation. In a sense, the Babylonian conquest is a foreshadow of the future distress of the Great Tribulation.

b. Some believe that it refers to the entire time Israel is in Babylonian captivity. However, the terror, dread, and destruction described in Jeremiah usually refers to the approach, arrival, and action of the enemy. Those descriptions were centered on the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, not necessarily the time of captivity.

c. The best interpretation is the view that holds “Jacob’s distress” as the Great Tribulation in the end times before Israel’s full restoration. It is the view that is most consistent with the description of the text as well as its parallel passages.

1) It is called “Jacob’s” distress because it will primarily deal with Israel in order to bring them to the Messiah at the time of His return. 2

2) This “time of distress” is unprecedented. It is called “great” and there will not be another day like it. Therefore, it must be the one and only “Great Tribulation.”

3) Jeremiah prophesied that the Lord’s anger would be accomplished and understood in the “latter days” (Jer 30:24). Sometimes the phrase “latter days” carries eschatological meaning (cf. Deu 4:30; Dan 10:14).

4) All of these explanations point to the fulfilment of Jacob’s distress in the end times.

5) This period of unprecedented difficulty for Israel, as the verse defines,

is set in a context of Israel's final restoration. It is best equated with the time of tribulation (cf. vv. 8, 9) just before Christ's Second Advent, mentioned elsewhere (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21, 22) and described in detail of Rev. 6–19 (MSB).

6) The first great purpose of the tribulation is to prepare the nation Israel for her Messiah. The prophecy of Jeremiah (30:7) makes it clear that this time that is coming has particular reference to Israel, for it is the time of Jacob's trouble (**Ironside**, Things to Come).

7) In the future, there will be a seven-year period (Dan. 9:27) during which God's plan to restore Israel will resume. The last half of this period will include unprecedented persecution and the wrath of Antichrist, who will commit an abominable act in the Jerusalem temple (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:34). Jeremiah says that this will be a unique period, a time of distress for Jacob, but that he shall be saved out of it (Jer. 30:7) (**MacArthur**, Biblical Doctrine).

2. Jacob's Distress in Scripture

a. As far back as Deuteronomy, a time of "distress" (Great Tribulation) for Israel was predicted in the "latter days" (Deu 4:30).

b. Zephaniah described the Great Day of the Lord as a "day of trouble and distress" (Zep 1:15).

c. Zechariah also described a day when all the nations would gather against Jerusalem. Though the word "distress" is not explicitly mentioned, it clearly depicts Israel's distress in the Great Tribulation (Zec 14:1-4).

d. Daniel prophesied of the same event and called it a "time of distress" and it was directed at Israel ["your people"] (Dan 12:1).

e. Matthew recorded Jesus' teaching to His disciples on the "great tribulation." It was a distress that had not occurred since the beginning of the world (Mat 24:21).

f. Mark identified the future distress as a "time of tribulation" which had never occurred (Mar 13:19).

g. Luke wrote of a time of "great distress" (Great Tribulation) upon Israel ["this people"] (Luk 21:23).

h. John wrote in Revelation of a period in which some had come out of the "great tribulation" (Rev 7:14).

E. Yoke will be Broken (8) - Though Nebuchadnezzar's yoke will eventually be broken from the neck of Israel, "that day" refers to the ultimate breaking of all foreign yokes at

the end of the Great Tribulation.

F. Will Serve God and David (9) - It is only in “that day” that Israel will truly serve the Lord their God. That will be the future time when the Ultimate King David (Christ) will be raised up to sit on the throne (cf. Davidic Covenant - 2Sa 7:12-13 and Jer 23:5, 6; Eze 37:24, 25; Dan 7:13, 14, 27; Mat 25:34; 26:64; Luk 1:32; Rev 17:14; 19:16).

G. Israel will be Saved (10) - After “Jacob’s distress,” Christ will return from heaven (from afar) to save Israel. He will usher Israel into the Millennial Kingdom where He will rule, and Israel will return and be at ease (Isa 9:7).

H. Jacob Will Not be Destroyed Completely (11) - According to the Lord’s justice, He will not leave Judah unpunished for their sin. The Lord will also destroy the nations for their sin. However, He will not destroy Israel completely (cf. Jer 4:27; 5:10, 18; 46:28 cf. Amo 9:8).

Wiersbe: To summarize: The people of Judah and Jerusalem will experience terrible trials at the hands of the Babylonians. They will end up wearing the Gentile yoke, bearing the wounds caused by their sins, and having endured the storm of God’s wrath. But God would eventually deliver them, breaking the yoke, healing the wounds, and bringing peace after the storm. All of this will be a foreshadowing of what will happen to the Jews in the end times as they go through the Tribulation, meet their Messiah-King, and enter into their kingdom.

TEXT: Jeremiah 31:2-40

TITLE: NEW COVENANT FOCUS -- RESTORATION BLESSINGS AND PROMISES

BIG IDEA:

THE FOCUS ON THE NEW COVENANT DEFINES THE CONTEXT FOR GUARANTEED FUTURE RESTORATION BLESSINGS AND PROMISES

INTRODUCTION:

New is not always better. We know that from the many products we have purchased over the years. When it comes to appliances, while they are certainly more energy efficient, they don't hold up over time like the refrigerators and dishwashers and washers and dryers of the previous generation. But when it comes to God's covenants – New is definitely better. The Book of Hebrews makes clear the vast quality difference between the two covenants. Here in this text we have the only OT exposition of the New Covenant. It is set in the context of the blessings and promises associated with Israel's restoration (speaking of the combined northern and southern kingdoms) to the promised land. This was a restoration that had its foretaste in the historical return from captivity but can only be ultimately fulfilled in the end times.

THE FOCUS ON THE NEW COVENANT DEFINES THE CONTEXT FOR GUARANTEED RESTORATION BLESSINGS AND PROMISES

I. (:2-14) RESTORATION BLESSINGS

A. (:2-6) Security of Restoration Blessings

1. (:2) Endurance Resulting in Rest and Security by God's Grace

*“Thus says the LORD,
‘The people who survived the sword
Found grace in the wilderness—
Israel, when it went to find its rest.’”*

All of the blessings flow out of God's amazing grace;
Turmoil and suffering replaced by peace and rest and security

Parunak: In English, the verbs are in the past tense, and we are apt to jump to the conclusion that this action must therefore be past. It might be; this form of Hebrew verb is often used for past tense action. But biblical Hebrew does not really have tenses. It distinguishes **completed action** from **ongoing action**, and this is the verb form that emphasizes the completedness of the action. It is used not only for the past, but also for prophecies about the future, which are "as good as done" because they are the Word of God.

Longman: The mention of the desert fits in with a theme that we find in other prophets (**Hos. 2:14-16; Isa. 40:1-5**): that God's coming judgment is in essence a reversal of redemptive history. God had previously brought Israel into the promised land from the

desert. Now because of judgment he is going to hurl them out of the land and into what is theologically and metaphorically the desert, though in actuality it will entail a deportation to Babylon. But this oracle says that God will meet the survivors of the judgment and will restore them to covenant relationship. This restoration in essence will grant them relief (**rest**) from the troubles of exile.

2. (:3) Everlasting Love

*“The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying,
‘I have loved you with an everlasting love;
Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness.’”*

Tremendous security found in God’s love which draws us to Himself and then holds us fast so that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Mackay: looks back to the basis of Israel’s relationship with the Lord as founded solely in the sovereign initiative and love of God. . . His everlasting love keeps the door constantly open for the returning prodigal.

Ryken: What does *love* mean? In the words of **Geerhardus Vos:**

The prophet means to describe by this term something quite extraordinary, something well-nigh inconceivable, a supreme wonder in that land of wonders which religion can never cease to be. Love is to him the highest form of the spiritual embrace of person by person. To ascribe it to God in connection with a creature is as the farthest remove from being a figure of speech. It means that in the most literal sense He concentrates all the light and warmth of His affection, all the prodigious wealth of its resources, his endless capacity of delight, upon the heart-to-heart union between the pious and Himself. And what God for His part brings into this union has a generosity, a sublime abandon, an absoluteness, that, measured by human analogies, we can only designate as the highest and purest type of devotion. It is named love for this very reason, that God puts into it His heart and soul and mind and strength, and gathers all His concerns with His people into the focus of this one desire.

3. (:4-5) Enjoyment of Restoration

a. Rebuilding

*“Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt,
O virgin of Israel!”*

Mackay: The whole social, economic and religious fabric of the land will be regenerated.

Thompson: Once again Yahweh will build his people securely.

b. Rejoicing

*“Again you will take up your tambourines,
And go forth to the dances of the merry-makers.”*

c. Replanting

*“Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria;
The planters will plant and will enjoy them.”*

Constable: quoting **Scalise** -- This restoration reverses at least six aspects of the judgment suffered by Israel and Judah: no resting place in exile, a nation torn down, celebrations silenced, vines and plants uprooted, watchmen announcing the invading conqueror, and the temple destroyed. The poem also introduces an Israel transformed from a desperate adulteress (**Jeremiah 4:30**) to a joyful maiden on her way back to God.

Cf. **Lev. 19:23-25** – takes 5 years before you can enjoy the fruit from the vineyards – so points to the permanent nature of this restoration

4. (:6) Encouragement to Visit Jerusalem

*“For there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out,
‘Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.’”*

Prophecy envisions the restoration of a united kingdom – both north and south together. Ephraim is the main tribe of the former northern kingdom.

No longer are watchmen performing the function of alerting the people to the danger of invading enemy forces; now there is the security to travel in safety to Jerusalem to worship God and enjoy the holy city

Constable: Watchmen in the Northern Kingdom would again summon their fellow countrymen to make pilgrimages to God’s chosen city, Jerusalem, to worship Him there. After the kingdom divided, the northern Israelites worshipped at Bethel and Daniel, not at Jerusalem. Thus a reunited Israel is in view.

Parunak: The people will once again go up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.
NB: These are the people of Ephraim, the northern kingdom, who are going to Jerusalem, something that Jeroboam forbade them at the time of the split after Solomon. Not only are the people brought back to the land, but they are reunited as they have not been for centuries. Thus they are better off after the captivity than they were before!

B. (:7-9) Staging of Restoration Blessings

1. (:7) Anticipation of Triumphant Deliverance for the Remnant

*“For thus says the LORD,
‘Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
And shout among the chief of the nations;
Proclaim, give praise and say,
O LORD, save Your people,
The remnant of Israel.’”*

2. (:8-9) Arrival in the Promised Land

a. (:8) Regathering to the Promised Land

*“Behold, I am bringing them from the north country,
And I will gather them from the remote parts of the earth,
Among them the blind and the lame,
The woman with child and she who is in labor with child,
together;
A great company, they will return here.”*

Guzik: quoting **Spurgeon:** "I believe in the restoration of the Jews to their own land in the last days. I am a firm believer in the gathering in of the Jews at a future time. Before Jesus Christ shall come upon this earth again, the Jews shall be permitted to go; to their beloved Palestine." (1855 sermon)

Longman: the blind and the lame along with pregnant women – two classes of people who normally would find it difficult to travel in such a way. God will see to it that even they make it back safely.

b. (:9) Redirection by Divine Guidance from a Nurturing Heavenly Father

*“With weeping they will come,
And by supplication I will lead them;
I will make them walk by streams of waters,
On a straight path in which they will not stumble;
For I am a father to Israel,
And Ephraim is My firstborn.”*

Parunak: Why should they weep when they are returning? Can't say that these are only tears of joy, because he also mentions "supplications." Yet it is completely consistent: it is only when the Lord saves us from our sin that we fully realize its enormity, and repent of it. In fact, deep conviction and sorrow for sin is one of the greatest evidences of the Spirit's work in our lives.

Constable: quoting **Keil** -- The designation of Ephraim as the first-born of Jahveh simply shows that, in the deliverance of the people, Ephraim is in no respect to be behind Judah,-that they are to receive their full share in the Messianic salvation of the whole people; in other words, that the love which the Lord once displayed towards Israel, when He delivered them out of the power of Pharaoh, is also to be, in the future, displayed towards the ten tribes, who were looked on as lost.

C. (:10-14) Summary of Restoration Blessings

1. (:10) Shepherding – the **Loving Care** of God

*“Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,
And declare in the coastlands afar off,
And say, ‘He who scattered Israel will gather him
And keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock.’”*

The nations are now addressed

2. (:11) Ransoming/Redeeming – the **Power** of God

*“For the LORD has ransomed Jacob
And redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he.”*

3. (:12) Prospering – the **Bounty** of God

*“They will come and shout for joy on the height of Zion,
And they will be radiant over the bounty of the LORD—
Over the grain and the new wine and the oil,
And over the young of the flock and the herd;
And their life will be like a watered garden,
And they will never languish again.”*

4. (:13-14) Satisfying – the **Goodness** of God

*“Then the virgin will rejoice in the dance,
And the young men and the old, together,
For I will turn their mourning into joy
And will comfort them and give them joy for their sorrow.
I will fill the soul of the priests with abundance,
And My people will be satisfied with My goodness,’ declares the LORD.”*

How can we turn to broken cisterns for satisfaction when all that we need has been provided for us in Jesus Christ

Thompson: The range of their former grief is indicated by three words, *weeping* (v.9), *mourning*, and *grief*.

Parunak: His goodness, according to v.12, consists of material bounty--yet their satisfaction is not in those things per se, but in his goodness, the knowledge that they are his gifts and come from his hand.

Longman: Interestingly, in the last verse of the oracle, the **priests** are specified as receiving God’s **abundance**. Thus, the priests who survive will reap the reward. This is notable particularly since the priests have received their share of blame for the judgment that will come on Israel because of their sin. In an unusual move, the final parallelism moves from specific (priests) to general (people). However the point is clear, the entire remnant will enjoy prosperity.

II. (:15-26) RESTORATION PROMISES

A. (:15-20) Promises of Comfort From God to Rachel and Ephraim

1. (:15-17) Comfort Based on Future Hope –
The Weeping of Rachel

a. (:15) Bitter Weeping

*“Thus says the LORD,
‘A voice is heard in Ramah,
Lamentation and bitter weeping.
Rachel is weeping for her children;
She refuses to be comforted for her children,
Because they are no more.’”*

Mackay: This is a poetic description of great poignancy of the devastating impact deportation had had on the northern kingdom.

Longman: The significance of this Ramah in this context appears to be the fact that it was a deportation center (so **Jer. 40:1**). Thus, from here, the Israelites were shipped off to exile in Babylon. No wonder it was a place of great weeping.

Parunak: Rachel is the wife of Jacob and mother of Joseph and Benjamin, Jacob's two favorite sons. Joseph's children Ephraim and Manasseh founded tribes that were prominent in the northern kingdom; Benjamin remained with Judah in the southern kingdom. Thus she is invoked as a figure of the nation, just as her husband Jacob is in **30:10**. She sees both kingdoms, thus both of her sons, led into captivity, and mourns for them. . . Thus the turn in Jacob's fortunes, from one bereaved to one blessed, is presented as an encouragement for the nation now. The exile both of north and of south is not permanent, but will be reversed. . .

Why does Matthew (**2:18**) see this as fulfilled in the massacre of the infants of Bethlehem by Herod? Herod was not a Jew, but an Edomite. In Matthew's time, the land is still under the pagan domination that began for Judah in 600 B.C. As we have seen several times, the "restoration" under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah fell far short of what the prophets promise. Matthew, with his overwhelming concern for the kingship of the Lord Jesus, is concerned to point out that the nation is still suffering under pagan rule and in need of its royal Messiah. The specific prophecy about Rachel may have been suggested because Rachel's tomb is near Bethlehem, where the infants were slain (**Gen. 35:19**). . .

Application: The Lord comforts us as well as mourning Rachel. And his comfort is likely to be along the lines of the two principles he proclaimed to her.

1) He will surely reward faithfulness. **1 Cor. 3:9-15; 4:1-5**. Compare the parables of the talents in the Gospels. **Heb. 6:10**, it would be unrighteous of God to forget our work for him, and he will not.

2) That reward may not appear right away; we must be content to wait for payday. **Heb. 10:30-39**.

b. (:16) Bereavement Reversed

*“Thus says the LORD,
‘Restrain your voice from weeping
And your eyes from tears;
For your work will be rewarded,’ declares the LORD,*

'And they will return from the land of the enemy.'”

c. (:17) Bright Future

*“There is hope for your future,’ declares the LORD,
'And your children will return to their own territory.’”*

2. (:18-20) Comfort Based on Repentance in Response to Divine Discipline –
The Grieving of Ephraim

a. (:18) Submission to Discipline

*“I have surely heard Ephraim grieving,
'You have chastised me, and I was chastised,
Like an untrained calf;
Bring me back that I may be restored,
For You are the LORD my God.’”*

b. (:19) Shame Leading to Repentance

*“For after I turned back, I repented;
And after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh;
I was ashamed and also humiliated
Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’”*

c. (:20) Salve of Divine Mercy

*“Is Ephraim My dear son?
Is he a delightful child?
Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him,
I certainly still remember him;
Therefore My heart yearns for him;
I will surely have mercy on him,’ declares the LORD.’”*

Thompson: The Hebrew text in the last line reads literally *'my bowels rumble for him'* but has to be rendered *my heart yearns for him*. The very vivid anthropomorphism depicts God's stomach being churned up with longing for his son

B. (:21-22) Promises Conditioned on Resolute Repentance

1. (:21) Return – Get on track

*“Set up for yourself roadmarks,
Place for yourself guideposts;
Direct your mind to the highway,
The way by which you went.
Return, O virgin of Israel,
Return to these your cities.’”*

Parunak: *"Set up waymarks."* Perhaps a reference to a common technique for navigating across the desert that lies between Babylon and Israel. With no landmarks, it's easy to end up walking in a circle. So travelers set up pillars as they move along, frequently enough that two or three are visible at a time, and keep them in a straight line.

2. (:22a) Resolve – Don't be doubleminded

*“How long will you go here and there,
O faithless daughter?”*

Guzik: In light of the great love and restoration of God, it made no sense for Israel to remain in their backslidden condition a moment longer. If this restoration was promised, they should take it by faith immediately instead of waiting for an undefined time in the future to return.

3. (:22b) Respond – Embrace your God

*“For the LORD has created a new thing in the earth—
A woman will encompass a man.”*

Parunak: The motivation in **22b** is an extremely puzzling saying. The church fathers thought it was a reference to the virgin birth, but there is no evidence of that in the context, and the NT does not allude to it as a prophecy. But if we consider it in the context of the command, we may have a clue. It is the man who usually surrounds, protects, provides for the woman, but in this transaction with Israel, God brings them to the point where they must do something in order to return to the land, something for which they are not suited by nature.

Women are legendary for playing "hard-to-get:" you've heard of the fellow who chased a girl until she caught him! But when God brings his people to the point of repentance, he expects them to step out and come to him. In Israel's case, the restoration in view is to the land, and the action required of the nation is to return. He is her husband, and you might expect that she would be totally passive in this restoration, but he commands her, the virgin of Israel, to make her way across the desert and return to him. This was not a trivial command: at the first restoration, many of them did not. But God wants them to **surround him, to press upon him, to make their devotion to him explicit**. He has already proposed; they need to respond with a resounding "Yes."

Application: More generally, once God presents us with the gospel and shows us our individual sin, he expects us to make an explicit decision and receive Jesus Christ. Now, we are as ill-suited to do this as a young woman is to pile up stones in the desert and maintain a highway, and the Scriptures are clear that God is the one who enables us to come to him--but still we must come. We must decide to forsake our sin, just as Israel had to forsake the homes and gardens she built in Babylon. And the way will not be easy. It is a wilderness that requires us to build stone pillars and repair the road in order to reach our destination. God will enable us to cross it, but we must actually do the crossing.

Longman: It appears that what we have here is something of a reversal of roles. We might expect the strong man to surround the female, whether surround is taken as a reference to a sexual embrace and/or protection. The reversal is likely the reason why it is called new ... we might understand this as indicating that Israel has embraced God,

thus expressing her repentant attitude that has turned from faithless wandering.

C. (:23-25) Promises of Celebratory Worship

1. (:23) Judah's Worship

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Once again they will speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes,
The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy hill!'"*

Thompson: Yahweh is Israel's true resting place and her impregnable refuge. One again he would dwell in the midst of his people to bless them.

2. (:24) Judah's Security

*"Judah and all its cities will dwell together in it,
the farmer and they who go about with flocks."*

3. (:25) Judah's Delight

*"For I satisfy the weary ones
and refresh everyone who languishes."*

Parunak: The overall sequence of events bears repeating, as a pattern for our experience:

1. When we despair, God brings us the good news that salvation is available.
2. When we repent of our sin, he assures us of his love and of our place in his family.
3. We must turn enthusiastically to him to lay hold of the salvation that he provides for us.
4. When we worship him, he brings us blessing.

(:26) EPILOGUE

"At this I awoke and looked, and my sleep was pleasant to me."

III. (:27-40) RESTORATION FOCUS

Parunak: Internal structure of the covenant section: three-fold repetition of the formula, "*Behold, the days come.*"

- a) 27-30, a revised concept of sin.
- b) 31-37, a renewed covenant with God.
- c) 38-40, a restored capital for the nation.

A. (:27-30) Revised Concept of Sin

1. (:27-28) Planting and Edifying Instead of Destroying

"Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down,

to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,' declares the LORD."

Again, both northern and southern kingdoms are involved together in this restoration

Guzik: Earlier in Jeremiah, God gave the prophet the commission *to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant (Jeremiah 1:10)*. Much of the Book of Jeremiah to this point has been a work of plucking up and breaking down; yet God promised to also build and to plant.

2. (:29-30) Personal Accountability for Sin

*"In those days they will not say again,
'The fathers have eaten sour grapes,
And the children's teeth are set on edge.'
But everyone will die for his own iniquity; each man who eats the sour
grapes, his teeth will be set on edge."*

Constable: In that time of future blessing, people would no longer repeat a popular proverb that said that the children were suffering because of their fathers' sins. This proverb expressed a popular misconception (cf. **Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:2-4**). It blamed present trouble on past ancestors inordinately. In that day, everyone would bear the consequences of his own actions. Justice would be obvious then, even though at present it did not seem to be operating. Whereas people do suffer consequences for the sins of their ancestors to a limited extent (corporate responsibility), they much more consistently suffer for their own sins (individual responsibility).

B. (:31-37) Renewed Covenant with God

1. (:31-34) New Covenant Introduced

a. (:31-32) Institution of the New Covenant Contrasted with Old Covenant

"Behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD."

Guzik: Throughout the Bible, God reveals His plan of redemption through a series of covenants. After the extended story of the fall and ruin of humanity in **Genesis 1-11**, the story of the covenants begins.

- The Abrahamic Covenant promised to Abraham and His covenant descendants a land, a nation, and a blessing to extend to all nations (**Genesis 12:1-3**)
- The Mosaic or Sinai Covenant gave Israel the law, the sacrifices, and the choice of blessing or curse (**Exodus 19**)

· The Davidic Covenant that promised an everlasting dynasty, a perfect ruler, and the Promised Messiah (**2 Samuel 7**)

· God's plan of redemption through the covenants is completed and perfected in the New Covenant. Over the span of Old Testament passages that announce the new covenant (especially **Ezekiel 11:16-20, 36:16-28, and Eze 37:21-28**), we see the promises of gathered Israel, of cleansing and spiritual transformation, and the reign of the Messiah. . . The writer to the Hebrews quotes this passage and develops the theme of the new covenant, especially in contrast to the old (**Hebrews 8:8, 8:13, 9:15, and Heb 12:14**).

b. (:33) Heart of the New Covenant Based on Internal Law Rather Than External

“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.’”

Constable: Instead of God’s law being external to them, the Lord would write it on their heart (i.e., mind and will; cf. **Jeremiah 17:1**). He will do something for them that they cannot do for themselves (cf. **Deuteronomy 30:5-6**). "Writing on the heart" suggests the removal of written documents and merely human mediators. Having the Lord’s Word in the heart prevents sin and fosters obedience (cf. **Deuteronomy 11:18; Psalm 119:11**).

Wiersbe: The New Covenant is **inward** so that God’s Law is written on the heart and not on stone tablets . . . The emphasis is **personal** rather than national, with each person putting faith in the Lord and receiving a “*new heart*” and with it a new disposition towards godliness. The Old Covenant tried to control conduct, but the New Covenant changes character so that people can love the Lord and one another and want to obey God’s will.

c. (:34) Relationship of the New Covenant Based on Forgiveness of Sins Rather Than Covering of Sin

“They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares the LORD, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’”

Thompson: The word *know* here probably carries its most profound connotation, the intimate personal knowledge which arises between two persons who are committed wholly to one another in a relationship that touches mind, emotion, and will. In such a relationship the past is forgiven and forgotten.

Longman: The fact that he will not remember their sins does not mean that God will erase his memory of them. To remember is to act upon something. To not remember is to not act upon it. He will not treat them as if they are sinners.

2. (:35-37) Covenant Commitment Affirmed

a. (:35) Sovereignty of God

*“Thus says the LORD,
Who gives the sun for light by day
And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
The LORD of hosts is His name.”*

b. (:36-37) Surety of Covenant

1) (:36) Permanence of Covenant Based on Natural Order in Creation

*“‘If this fixed order departs
From before Me,’ declares the LORD,
‘Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
From being a nation before Me forever.’”*

Guzik: The message from God is both powerful and plain. God will stop thinking of and dealing with Israel as a nation when the sun, moon, and stars stop giving light and when the sea stops roaring. As long as those things continue, God will regard Israel as a nation before Him forever.

2) (:37) Permanence of Covenant Based on Infinite Scope of Creation

*“Thus says the LORD,
‘If the heavens above can be measured
And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
For all that they have done,’ declares the LORD.”*

C. (:38-40) Restored Capital for the Nation

1. (:38) Physical Capital City Rebuilt

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when the city will be rebuilt for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate.’”

Guzik: God announced that the literal city of Jerusalem would be rebuilt, using specific geographic markers to clearly explain that He intended that literal, material Jerusalem be understood and not symbolic or spiritual Jerusalem.

2. (:39) Physical Boundaries Defined

*“The measuring line will go out farther straight ahead to the hill Gareb;
then it will turn to Goah.”*

3. (:40) Permanent Dedication as Holy to the Lord

“And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be holy to the LORD; it will not be plucked up or overthrown anymore forever.”

Constable: The whole new, enlarged city would be devoted to Yahweh, and it would never experience invasion or overthrow again. The valley of the dead bodies probably refers to the Hinnom Valley to Jerusalem’s south and west (cf. **Jeremiah 7:31**). The Kidron Brook lay on Jerusalem’s east side, and the Horse Gate stood at the southeast corner of the city wall and led out to the Kidron Valley. What had formerly been unclean land, full of dead bodies, would be holy to the Lord. The city’s change in character would be even more remarkable than its change in size.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What aspects of this prophecy show us that ultimate fulfillment still lies in the future for the nation of Israel (combined northern and southern kingdoms) as opposed to completely fulfilled in the restoration from Babylonian Captivity?
- 2) How is repentance different from remorse?
- 3) Do we find our satisfaction and fulfillment completely in our relationship to the Lord Jesus so that He is sufficient for our joy?
- 4) How do believers today participate in the New Covenant (cf. book of Hebrews)?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Daryl Hilbert: Precursor to the New Covenant (:1-16)

I. CONTEXT

A. In chapter 30 the restoration of Judah is foretold; here that of Israel is predicted. The messages of hope and restoration, it will be recalled, carry through chapter 33 [so KD] (Feinberg).

B. The first theme in Chapter 31 is the “Precursor to the New Covenant,” which is the restoration of Israel (Jer 31:1-30). The second and great theme is the “Promise of the New Covenant” to Israel (Jer 31:31-40).

II. RESTORATION PLAN OF THE LORD (1-6)

A. God will be God of all Israel (1)

1. The phrase “at that time,” looks back to the mention of the “latter days” in Jer 30:24. The “latter days” would certainly mean after Israel was restored from Babylonian Captivity. But, ultimately, the “latter days” will be during the restoration of Israel in the Millennium with their righteous king sitting on the throne of David (cf. Deu 4:30; Dan 10:14) (notes from Jer 30:24).

2. It is the Lord who is giving this declaration and it will be the Lord carrying it out. He will be their God once again and they will be His people. However, the overarching emphasis is that fact that the Lord is speaking to all the families of Israel (northern and southern kingdoms).

3. The Lord spoke to the entire nation of Israel in Jer 31:1. Through the rest of this chapter the Lord refers back and forth to both the northern and southern tribes.

4. Verses 2-22 deal mainly with Israel, 23-26 with Judah, and 27-40 with both kingdoms. It is absolutely clear that both kingdoms will return to Palestine and jointly share the blessings of God (Smith Commentary).

B. From the Sword to Rest (2)

1. Though this verse may have some allusion to the Exodus wanderings in the wilderness (cf. Exo 14:5-23), it most likely referred to those who survived the Captivity and its sword.

2. Just as Israel eventually found grace to come out of the wilderness, so those in Captivity (Assyrian and Babylonian) will find grace to return to Jerusalem (cf. Hos 2:14-15).

C. The Lord’s Love is Everlasting (3)

1. Those who repent while in Captivity would find a restored love relationship with their God. It was because of God’s everlasting love that He drew Israel back to Himself.

2. This has always been the divine protocol for Israel and New Testament believers, either initially or consequentially (Deu 4:37; 10:15; Psa 78:68; Joh 15:19; Eph 1:4).

D. The Lord Will Rebuild Israel (4)

1. It is the Lord who does the rebuilding. Here He promised to rebuild Israel (“you”) as well as rebuild Jerusalem. There will be great rejoicing similar to times past (tambourines, Exo 15:20; merry-makers, 2Sa 6:14).

2. The phrase “O virgin of Israel!” most likely referred to the northern kingdom. This is strengthened by the mention of Samaria (Jer 31:5) and Ephraim (Jer 31:6, 9, 18, 20).

E. Vineyards Will Flourish in Samaria (5)

1. Among many other regions in the Israel, the “hills of Samaria” were known for their vineyards. They will be planted and restored. Samaria is located in the northern kingdom.

2. The Law of Moses forbid eating of the fruit from newly planted trees for the first four years (Lev 19:23–25). Therefore, these vineyards had been established for at least five years emphasizing God’s blessing of restoration so that the planters could enjoy them.

3. The Law of Moses forbid eating of the fruit from newly planted trees for the first four years (Lev 19:23–25). Since the planters were able to eat and enjoy the fruit, the Lord had established the vineyards for at least five years prior.

F. Ephraim Announces Worship in Zion (6)

1. The “hills of Ephraim,” also located in the northern kingdom, would be called to worship once again in Zion (Jerusalem).

2. According to Jewish tradition, the watchers had several responsibilities, but among their most important was to give the call to worship and direct pilgrims to Jerusalem (Feinberg).

3. This will mark the end of the disruption of the kingdom of Solomon in 930 B.C. Ephraim’s condition in blessing will be permanent because Jeroboam’s misleading them from the 2nd Lord’s sanctuary will be a thing of the past, when they return to Zion. The breach of many centuries will at last be healed (EXP).

III. RESTORATION OF JACOB’S JOY (7-14)

A. Gladness for Jacob (7)

1. There are five verbs that express the joy of Jacob (“Sing,” “shout,” “proclaim,” “give praise,” and “say”).

2. Jacob (Israel) is the “chief of the nations” because the Lord has not only chosen it but also “saved” the remnant.

B. Great Company Will Return (8)

1. The Lord would gather a great company of His people from the north who had been in Assyrian Captivity.

2. Among those who were the remnant, none would be excluded. This included the blind, the lame, and those who were in labor (cf. Isa 35:5-10).

C. Weeping Replaced by Joy (9)

1. Furthermore, the return will be accompanied by weeping and tears of repentance (v.9). Weeping for their sin and rebellion will then be overshadowed by the joy of return (EXP).

2. Weeping will be replaced by guidance (“by supplication I will lead them”), joy, and refreshment (“streams of waters”).

3. Ephraim’s (Israel’s) sonship as “firstborn” reemphasizes God’s elective (Exo 4:22) and salvific (Deu 32:6) purposes.

4. Sonship in the OT includes the concept of paternal love and care on a national scale, rather than the NT concept of personal membership in the family of God by the Spirit. (EXP).

D. Great Shepherd Will Lead (10)

1. The entire world (“all the nations” “coastlands afar off”) was to hear about the Lord’s great deliverance.

2. The Sovereign Lord scattered His people but will also gather His people. The Lord had chastised them (Jer 13:17) but restored them as a flock by the Shepherd (Isa 40:11).

E. Jacob Will Be Ransomed (11)

1. Jacob would be ransomed (padah - transfer of ownership, i.e. buy back) from Captivity.

2. Whether it was Pharaoh (Exo 6:5; 15:13), Sargon II (Isa 20:1), Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 52:30), or a demonic world ruler (2Th 2:8-9), the Lord would redeem them from the hand of those stronger than Israel.

F. Jacob Will Rejoice in Zion (12)

1. When Israel is restored, it will rejoice in Jerusalem (“Zion”). Their faces will be radiant over the Lord’s bounty and blessings.

2. These blessings are physical and spiritual, but they include new wine, oil, and a watered garden (Isa 58:11).

G. Sorrow Replaced by Joy (13)

1. All will rejoice in Zion, both young and old.

2. Their mourning and suffering will be turned into joy.

H. Experience the joy of the Lord (14)

1. The soul of the priests will have abundance because they have a relationship with the Lord, they are serving the Lord, and the people also are following the Lord.

2. They will all be filled with the goodness and joy of the Lord.

IV. RESTORATION FROM ISRAEL’S CAPTIVITY (15-22)

A. A Voice is Heard in Ramah (15a)

1. The present circumstance for the northern kingdom (and soon to be for the southern kingdom) was death and captivity.

2. Ramah was often seen as the dividing line between the two kingdoms. In fact, battles had been fought over its boundary (1Ki 15:17, 21-22). So, Ramah itself becomes an allusion to both kingdoms.

3. Later in the book of Jeremiah, Ramah will be the place where the captives would wait to be taken to Babylon (Jer 40:1).

B. Rachel is Weeping for Her Children (15b)

1. Rachel was the mother of both Joseph (father of Ephraim and Manasseh in northern kingdom) and Benjamin (in southern kingdom).

2. Therefore, she weeps for her children in the northern and southern kingdom who would be killed or taken captive.

C. Massacre of the Innocence (Mat 2:17-18)

1. In Mat 2:17-18, Matthew quotes from Jer 31:15. Matthew's application was that Rachel was a picture of all the mothers of Israel, both north and south, weeping for the children in the Massacre of the Innocence (Captivity). However, the case in Matthew's gospel was that the children were not taken in captivity but were slain by Herod the Great.

2. Yet, in Jer 31:16, there would be the future hope of returning to Zion. In Matthew's case, Jesus would not be slain by Herod but would be the Savior by dying for man's sin on the cross.

V. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. Hope of Jer 31:15-16

B. Hope of the Gospel

C. Hope of Everlasting Love

Constable: Perhaps an[other] illustration will help us better understand this dual fulfillment of the new-covenant prophecy. Standing with Jeremiah and Ezekiel at their vantage point in history, we are in a dark tunnel. As we look with them toward the light at the end of the tunnel, we see God making a new covenant with ethnic Israel. We then move through the tunnel and emerge into the light. There ahead of us we see the same scene we saw from afar-God implementing his covenant with ethnic Israel. But now that we have stepped out of the tunnel into the light, our peripheral vision is expanded. To the side of us, incapable of being seen from back in the tunnel, is another scene-God implementing this same covenant with the church of the present era, comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. The prophets were not wrong-they simply had "tunnel vision" because their focus was on ethnic Israel. [Note: **Chisholm**, Handbook on . . . , p196.]

T. Miles Bennett: The background to the announcement concerning a new covenant is the old covenant entered into by God and Israel at Sinai (**Exod. 19-24**). Basic to that agreement was the concept of God as sovereign Lord of the covenant who required Israel to obey certain agreed upon stipulations. Failure to do so would result in God's judgment. Israel's history from the time of Moses was one of persistent failure to live up to the terms of the covenant. They had not simply refused to obey the law and to acknowledge the Lord's sole sovereignty, but were actually incapable of such obedience (**13:23a**). Then how can a holy God continue his relationship with a sinful people? The answer is found in the concept of a new covenant whose very nature will be a guarantee against its failure. A new covenant was needed because the dynamic of the old one was not sufficient to enable them to live up to its demands, despite the fact that God had performed mighty acts of deliverance on their behalf and was a husband unto them (**v. 32**).

The new covenant, like the old, will be rooted in and rest on the divine initiative. The verbs, *I will make . . . I will write . . . I will be* (**v. 33**), all emphasize the fact that the covenant God is again taking the initiative in dealing with his people. Though Israel has been unfaithful to her covenant obligations, God has not forsaken her and again in sovereign grace comes to his people, not requiring but offering. The old covenant was inadequate. It could not be renewed; it must be replaced with something better. While there is continuity between the old and the new, there is also discontinuity. There is something new; not so much in its substance as in its springs of action. Under the old covenant the people were expected to obey the law. However God's law as an external code had no power within to elicit a full and free response from the people. But the time is coming when the desired dynamic will be available: *Says the Lord, I will put my law within them . . . will write it upon their hearts* (**v. 33b**).

Jeremiah, more than any other prophet discovered and developed the truth that it is the heart which must be properly related to God if life is to be vital and fruitful (e.g., **3:10, 17; 4:4, 14; 5:23; 11:20; 17:1, 5; 24:7**). In light of his constant and continuous emphasis upon the heart, it is not surprising that Jeremiah's interpretation of the ultimate in transformed character is a changed heart. God will write his law ("the revelation of his order of life for his people") on the heart, not on tablets of stone. The basis for this inner illumination and transformation is a knowledge of God, *for they shall all know me* (**v. 34**). Knowing God's will and doing God's will are both dependent upon knowing him. For Jeremiah knowing God meant a direct, dynamic intimate fellowship with him; obtained not by ceremony or creed but through contact and communion.

But how does a sinful man enter into such fellowship with a righteous God? One further act of grace on God's part is necessary: *For I will forgive their iniquity, and . . . remember their sin no more* (**v. 34**). There can be no meaningful fellowship with God apart from his forgiveness of sins. Jeremiah has made frequent mention of man's stubborn and wicked heart and man's inability to change it. God is the only one who can deliver man from his predicament. How he will do it is not Jeremiah's to say. But he

can and he will.

God not only forgives but he forgets our sins. To have the burden of guilt removed and to be set free from sin gives the forgiven one a new sense of worth and creates within the desire to be of real worth. Forgiveness also creates in the heart of the forgiven a keen sense of gratitude from which emerges an obedience which obeys, not through fear of penalty, but through a surge of love. Herein lies the dynamic in the new covenant which makes possible an obedience to the law (will) of God – a dynamic which was almost if not completely lacking in the old covenant.

Feinberg: (:31-40)

1. The time of the covenant (v. 31) – *“The time is coming”*
2. The Maker of the covenant (v. 31) – the Lord (vv. 3, 20, 32, 35)
3. The name of the covenant (vs. 31) – *“new”* (Rom 11:27; Heb 8:6-13; 10:14-18; also Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-25)
4. The parties of the covenant (v. 31) – *“house of Israel”* and *“house of Judah”* (cf. Ezek 37:15-19; Rom 9:4-5 – the nation of the covenants)
5. The contrasted covenant (v. 32) – not like the old covenant: based on merit and works, susceptible of infraction, no enablement (nonfulfilling), did not give life (Gal 3:21)
6. The nature of the covenant (vv. 33-34) – not dependent on external law nor human interpretation; law written on the heart; gives intimate knowledge of and fellowship with God, forgiveness of sins, and peace of heart
7. The immutability of the covenant (vv. 35-37) – the unchanging purpose of God reflected in the fixed order of nature
8. The physical aspects of the covenant (vv. 38-40) – rebuilt Jerusalem in holiness and permanence
9. The Guarantor of the covenant (vv. 31-40) – *“declares the Lord”* or *“the Lord says”* (nine times), as though to swear by himself (cf. Heb 6:17-18).

TEXT: Jeremiah 32:1-44

TITLE: *BANK ON THE FUTURE OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE AGENDA*

BIG IDEA:

**THE CURRENT CRISIS AND THE CERTAIN CALAMITY CANNOT
NEGATE GOD'S COVENANTAL CARE –
BUY THE LAND AND BURY THE DEED IN LIGHT OF FUTURE
RESTORATION**

INTRODUCTION:

This passage revolves around a simple real estate transaction. But this is an investment that requires tremendous faith on Jeremiah's part in God's covenantal faithfulness. An investment of 17 shekels (about 7 ounces) of silver for a plot of ground that would never benefit the prophet personally was a lot to ask in the midst of a current crisis where every resource was scarce and valuable. The decision to invest in God's future redemptive agenda must be based on reflecting on God's character and His previous works that have demonstrated His covenantal care.

This is true for the decisions that we make today. Are we going to trust God and Live for Eternity or are we going to walk by sight and limit our expectations of what our Omnipotent God can accomplish?

**THE CURRENT CRISIS AND THE CERTAIN CALAMITY CANNOT
NEGATE GOD'S COVENANTAL CARE –
BUY THE LAND AND BURY THE DEED IN LIGHT OF FUTURE
RESTORATION**

**I. (:1-25) CURRENT CRISIS CANNOT CANCEL GOD'S REDEMPTIVE
AGENDA**

(:1a) Introduction

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD"

A. (:1-5) Review of Jeremiah's Unpopular Prediction Regarding Current Crisis

1. (:1b-2) Prophetic Setting

a. (:1) Corresponding Date References

"in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar."

b. (:2) Circumstances

1) (:2a) Jerusalem Under Siege

"Now at that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem,"

2) (:2b) Jeremiah Under Guard

“and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the house of the king of Judah,”

2. (:3-5) Prophetic Scenario

a. (:3-5a) Unpopular Narration of Future Events

“because Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up, saying, ‘Why do you prophesy, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD,’”

1) Capture of the City

“Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will take it;”

2) Capture of the King

“and Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but he will surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon,”

3) Confrontation Involving Intimidation and Humiliation

“and he will speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye;”

Adam Clarke: He shall be reduced to a state of the most abject servitude. The slave was obliged to fix his eyes on every motion of the master whilst giving his orders, who often condescended to give them only by dumb signs.

Guzik: quoting **Trapp** -- This was no small punishment to Zedekiah, that he must look him in the face from whom he had so perfidiously revolted, even against oath; and hear his taunts, before he felt his fingers. How, then, will graceless persons do to stand before the King of kings, whom they have so greatly offended, at that great day?

4) Captivity in Babylon Controlled by the Lord

“‘and he will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and he will be there until I visit him,’ declares the LORD.”

b. (:5b) Unpopular Negative Outcome

“If you fight against the Chaldeans, you will not succeed?”

B. (:6-15) Redemption of Field at Anathoth Provides Object Lesson for Hope in God’s Redemptive Agenda

1. (:6-8) Pursuing the Right of Redemption

“And Jeremiah said, ‘The word of the LORD came to me saying, Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle is coming to you, saying, Buy for yourself my field which is at Anathoth, for you have the right of redemption to buy it.’

Then Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of the LORD and said to me, 'Buy my field, please, that is at Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for you have the right of possession and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.'

Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD."

Ray Stedman: This account suggests that the usual way God spoke to these prophets was the same way he speaks to us, i.e., through a vivid impression made upon the soul, an inner voice we are conscious of -- saying something, directing us somewhere, informing us of something. We have all had this experience. We know what this inner voice is like.

Guzik: Anathoth was about three miles outside Jerusalem. With Babylonian armies surrounding Jerusalem, the enemy already occupied Anathoth. Jeremiah was offered the purchase of land that was already under Babylonian control.

Ron Dunn: See, either Jeremiah had to buy the farm or change his message. What Hanamel was actually saying was this... "put your money where your mouth is...put up or shut up...you say you believe that one of these days God is going to restore this land...alright, then you shouldn't even hesitate about buying the farm...just prove it and back up your preaching with your pocketbook." And that's the theme of the whole story. . . Now I want to ask you tonight. Is there a farm that you're hesitating to buy? Is there something God has called you to do that you're hesitating to do? Are you fearful? Do you have doubt or uncertainty in your heart? If it's not worth investing in, it's not believing in. Sooner or later you are going to have to buy the farm. God is going to require it. God will not abandon you in the day of doubt and darkness...

2. (:9-10) Purchasing the Land

"I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanamel my uncle's son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed and sealed the deed, and called in witnesses, and weighed out the silver on the scales."

3. (:11-15) Preserving the Deeds for Future Development

"Then I took the deeds of purchase, both the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions and the open copy; and I gave the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the sight of Hanamel my uncle's son and in the sight of the witnesses who signed the deed of purchase, before all the Jews who were sitting in the court of the guard."

"And I commanded Baruch in their presence, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Take these deeds, this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an

earthenware jar, that they may last a long time.”

*“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,
‘Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.’”*

Parunak: This is the first time we meet Baruch, Jer’s secretary. He is the person who took down Jer’s prophecies by dictation. We will see much more of him in coming chapters. Probably a scribe at the court, whom Jer met while in prison, and whose heart the Lord touched, making him available not only to help Jer but also to preserve his teachings for us.

Constable: Jeremiah instructed Baruch to store the documents in an earthenware jar, so they would last a long time. These jars were undoubtedly similar to the ones in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were preserved and discovered two millennia later, still in fairly good condition. The jars were usually sealed with pitch. The Lord had revealed to Jeremiah that the Israelites would again buy and sell land in Judah. In spite of the imminent captivity, they would return to the land and resume life as usual eventually.

Thompson: If the practice was that of the Jewish community at Elephantine in Egypt in the late fifth century B.C., the contract was written out on papyrus and was then folded over several times, tied, and sealed. This was the closed official copy. An unsealed copy was attached to it for consultation... Similar ‘title deeds’ have been discovered in the Judean desert.

C. (:16-25) Reflections of Jeremiah on Nation’s Current Crisis in Light of God’s Person and Works

(:16) Introduction to Prayer of Jeremiah

*“After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah,
then I prayed to the LORD, saying,”*

Adam Clarke: And what a prayer! What weight of matter, sublimity of expression, profound veneration, just conception, Divine unction, powerful pleading, and strength of faith! Historical, without flatness; condensed, without obscurity; confessing the greatest of crimes against the most righteous of Beings, without despairing of his mercy, or presuming on his goodness: a confession that, in fact, acknowledges that God's justice should smite and destroy, had not his infinite goodness said, I will pardon and spare.

1. (:17-19) Reflecting on God’s Majestic Character

a. (:17) Majestic Power Demonstrated in Creation

*“Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the
earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm!
Nothing is too difficult for You,”*

b. (:18) Majestic Lovingkindness and Justice

“who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity

of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of hosts is His name;”

c. (:19) Majestic Wisdom and Omniscience

“great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds;”

Parunak: (:17-24) – Confessing the Lord – Jer’s confession become more and more concrete in three steps from natural theology (the sort of thing one could learn from the heavens; Ps. 19 and Rom. 1:20), through biblical theology (a summary of the main attributes of God according to the Old Testament – His passion, power and plan), to experiential theology (evidence of God’s work in the events of human history).

Constable: God is wise and strong, fully aware of all that happens, and just in giving everyone what he or she deserves. This is a classic statement of how God judges: according to people’s deeds, what they really do rather than what they intend or promise to do. The basis of divine judgment is human works (cf. **John 6:27-29; Revelation 22:12**).

2. (:20-22) Reflecting on God’s Redemptive Works

a. (:20) Signs and Wonders in Egypt

“who has set signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, and even to this day both in Israel and among mankind; and You have made a name for Yourself, as at this day.”

b. (:21) Signs and Wonders in Exodus from Egypt

“You brought Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs and with wonders, and with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with great terror;”

c. (:22) Signs and Wonders in Possessing the Promised Land

“and gave them this land, which You swore to their forefathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey.”

3. (:23-25) Reflecting on Present Calamity Due to Persistent Rebellion

a. (:23) Past Rebellion

“They came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey Your voice or walk in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do; therefore You have made all this calamity come upon them.”

b. (:24) Present Calamity

“Behold, the siege ramps have reached the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, the famine and the pestilence; and what

You have spoken has come to pass; and behold, You see it.”

Mackay: The siege ramps were mounds of stones and soil built up to the height of the city walls to permit access (6:6). The higher they got and the closer in they came, the more surely was the city’s doom sealed. Jeremiah is setting out the circumstances in which he is approaching God in prayer. The siege has almost been concluded: why now be told to buy a field?

c. (:25) Future Hope

“You have said to me, O Lord GOD, ‘Buy for yourself the field with money and call in witnesses’—although the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.”

Parunak: After this confession, Jer finally brings up the matter that’s troubling him. In *“thou hast said,”* *“thou”* is emphatic. “Lord, you’re the one who brought the Babylonians here; you yourself can see that your prophecies have come to pass; in keeping with all of your attributes, the city is given into the hand of the Babylonians – yet you yourself have me out buying real estate!”

The prayer is not asking for anything. It’s just sharing with the Lord the confusion that Jer feels. He doesn’t even ask the Lord for an explanation, but in the next section, the Lord graciously gives him one, which unfolds the full meaning of the symbol that consists of Jer’s purchase of the field.

Kidner: It is a fine example of the way to pray in a desperate situation: concentrating first on the creative power (17) and perfect fidelity and justice (18-19) of God; remembering next his great redemptive acts (20-23a; to which the Christian can now add the greatest of them all) - and then with this background, laying before God the guilt of the past (23b), the hard facts of the present (24) and the riddle of the future (25)

II. (:26-35) CERTAIN CALAMITY DUE TO PERSISTENT PROVOCATION

(:26) Introduction

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,”

Parunak: Outline of :27-44 -- an initial statement (27), followed by three occurrences of *“Thus saith the Lord”* (28, 36, 42). Thus four sections in all.

1. (:27)
2. (:28-35)
3. (:36-41)
4. (:42-44)

A. (:27) Implication from God’s Sovereign Omnipotence: Don’t Underestimate God

“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?”

God has been directing Jeremiah to proclaim some very bold prophecies. When the rubber meets the road, God must demonstrate that He can come thru on these prophecies. Jeremiah must also maintain his faith in God and in the accuracy of his preaching.

Parunak: Application: We ought not to limit God's sovereignty to the inanimate. There are many who gladly grant him control over the sun and moon, but who insist that man's free will is beyond his control. And even those who understand his sovereign election sometimes fret about the actions of others. But our God does whatever he pleases, among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. We can trust him even with the human side of our problem, knowing that if the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord, how much more the mind of the commoner.

Ray Stedman: Now, his problem is not the desolation of the city; it is the degradation of the people. I don't think Jeremiah worried a bit about God's ability to rebuild and restore this city. The thing that constituted a tremendous dilemma to him was that the city could not be restored unless the we were changed and cleansed and healed. That is where he stumbled because, remember, this man had been preaching to these people for forty years. For forty years he had poured out his heart to this people, declaring to them again and again the word of the Lord. And for forty years he had seen absolutely no sign of repentance -- nobody turned, nobody stopped, nobody changed. The kings all refused his testimony. And though God faithfully supported his prophet again and again by causing his words to come to pass, nevertheless this people stubbornly resisted. Jeremiah says, "I don't see how you can change them, God. They're too stubborn." Is that not our problem oftentimes? We say, "Oh, that person I expected to see changed is too stubborn. There's no way he can change."

B. (:28-29) Impending Destruction of Jerusalem

"Therefore thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I am about to give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will take it. The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city will enter and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses where people have offered incense to Baal on their roofs and poured out drink offerings to other gods to provoke Me to anger.'"

C. (:30-32) Inflaming of Divine Anger

1. Persistent Provocation to Anger

"'Indeed the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been doing only evil in My sight from their youth; for the sons of Israel have been only provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands,' declares the LORD."

Nothing but wickedness and evil works from their youth until the present day; no respite

2. Pervasive Provocation to Anger

“Indeed this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and My wrath from the day that they built it, even to this day, so that it should be removed from before My face, because of all the evil of the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah which they have done to provoke Me to anger—they, their kings, their leaders, their priests, their prophets, the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

Across the entire leadership: kings, leaders, priest, prophets
Across entire city of Jerusalem and southern nation of Judah

D. (:33-35) Insulting of Divine Righteousness

1. (:33) Obstinate Ignorance

“They have turned their back to Me and not their face; though I taught them, teaching again and again, they would not listen and receive instruction.”

2. (:34) Objectionable Impiety

“But they put their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it.”

Feinberg: The height of the nation’s impiety was reached when the people set up their idols in the temple of God himself. Their obscene symbols had been removed during Josiah’s reforms. But they were reintroduced in the years of apostasy after Josiah’s reign (cf. **Jeremiah 7:30; 2 Kings 23:4, 6; Ezekiel 8:3-11**).

3. (:35) Offensive Idolatry

“They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”

Parunak: (:33-35) draws our attention to three specific sins, at the level of the individual, the church, and the family.

1) **33**, Individually, they have refused to learn from God, in spite of his patient and repeated efforts to teach and warn them.

2) **34**, As a congregation of God’s people, they have defiled the temple itself with their abominations. They erected pagan altars even within the holy courts, and turned the worship of God into idolatry.

3) **35**, Most terribly, they have perverted the family by sacrificing their children to pagan deities.

III. (:36-44) COVENANTAL CARE DEMONSTRATED IN FUTURE RESTORATION

(:36) Introduction

*“Now therefore **thus says the LORD** God of Israel concerning this city of which you say, ‘It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine and by pestilence.’”*

Parunak: (:36-41) – This section is chiasitic: **37** and **41** deal with physical restoration to the land, while **38-40** focuses on the spiritual benefits of the new covenant. As we have already seen, the OT promises of the covenant bind geographic and spiritual restoration inextricably together. The NT makes the church the heir of the spiritual blessings, but the geographic ones await their fulfillment in the coming kingdom.

6 Demonstrations of Covenantal Care:

A. (:37) Regathering to the Promised Land for Safety and Prosperity

“Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety.”

B. (:38) Reunion for Personal Intimacy and Security

“They shall be My people, and I will be their God;”

C. (:39) Regeneration to Foster Heart-based Relationship and Righteousness

“and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them.”

Longman: To fear God means to recognize one’s proper place in the universe. It is to acknowledge that there is a being who is greater than oneself; indeed a being who has the power of life and death. The emotion is not as extreme as horror, but neither is it as slight as respect. Closer than the picture of horror or respect is that of knee-knocking awe. Such awe would lead to good consequences for that present generation as well as those that succeeded them. The book of Proverbs describes the good consequences that come on the wise and their descendants, wisdom being described as fear the Lord and staying away from evil (**Prov. 1:7**).

D. (:40) Renewal of Lasting Covenant Bond

“I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.”

E. (:41) Rejoicing in Establishing and Prospering His People

“I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.”

Adam Clarke: Nothing can please God better than our coming to him to receive the good which, with his whole heart and his whole soul, he is ready to impart.

Mackay: Not only will the people be joyful when the Lord intervenes to restore them (31:12-13); the Lord will derive pleasure from the new arrangements. . . The Lord's pleasure is not just in bestowing good on them; he rejoices "over them" (NKJV), or on account of them. His reverent and obedient people are a source of pleasure to him, and so he delights in bestowing on them further tokens of his favour. This especially is seen in the security they enjoy in the land.

F. (:42-44) Resolve to Accomplish Redemptive Agenda

"For thus says the LORD, 'Just as I brought all this great disaster on this people, so I am going to bring on them all the good that I am promising them. Fields will be bought in this land of which you say, It is a desolation, without man or beast; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans. Men will buy fields for money, sign and seal deeds, and call in witnesses in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland and in the cities of the Negev; for I will restore their fortunes,' declares the LORD."

God promises He will accomplish all of this – despite how improbable it seems given the present dire circumstances;

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How should we respond when God asks us to do something that does not seem pragmatic to us?
- 2) What can we learn about prayer from this passage?
- 3) Why does God sometimes ask us to do things that don't make sense to us?
- 4) What problems in your life cause you to doubt God's goodness or question His power to intervene and care for your needs?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: The siege mentioned in 32:2 lasted for 18 months (39:1-2), Jan. 588 – July 587.

About half-way through, probably late summer 588, three things happened, in this order:

- a) The Egyptians came to the rescue, and Neb lifted the siege for a short while.
- b) Jer was imprisoned.
- c) Neb reimposed the siege. The time statements of **1-2** indicate that the siege was imposed by the time the revelation of **27ff** arrived, but the events of **6-25** must have happened during the brief window of openness (or at least **6-16**; **vs. 25** might suggest that the siege was back in force by the time Jer prayed, though then again, the reference to the mounts rather than to the army may reflect Neb's temporary absence.)

Wiersbe: That, however, is what faith is all about: obeying God in spite of what we see, how we feel, and what may happen. It's well been said that faith is not believing in spite of evidence but obeying in spite of consequences, and Jeremiah's actions illustrate that maxim. When word got out that Jeremiah was investing in worthless real estate, many people must have laughed, others shook their heads in disbelief, and some probably thought he was crazy. . .

The application of this Scripture for today's believer is obvious: The world laughs at us for our faith and our investments in the future, but one day God will keep His promises and vindicate us before people and angels. Instead of living for the sinful pleasures of this present world, we seek the joys of the world to come. We refuse to sacrifice the eternal for the temporal. The unbelieving world may ridicule us, but ultimately God will vindicate His people.

Mackay: When the siege ramps are in process of construction round the city, it takes great faith to believe that there is a prosperous future beyond the imminent collapse. Already there had been substantial hardship and loss of life, and the dislocation that would be involved in their impending deportation to an enemy land did not hold out any immediate amelioration of their conditions. But the very God who unequivocally announced that the disaster would come on his people also provided a lifeline for them if they would put their trust in him. By his command to Jeremiah he vividly set before the people that his dealings with them and their land were not going to end with catastrophic judgment. Their sin would be punished, but that would not terminate his commitment to them, and beyond all that they would have to endure in the immediate future as the judicial consequences of their sin, he would act to ensure that there would be a new start.

Peter Wallace: Redemption: A Lesson in Long Term Investment

Introduction: The Siege of Jerusalem and the Imprisonment of Jeremiah (v1-5)

Zedekiah is the last son of Josiah. Two of his older brothers – and his nephew – have reigned in Jerusalem before him. In chapter 21, we heard how King Zedekiah had sent a messenger to ask Jeremiah to inquire of the LORD: “*Perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all his wonderful deeds and will make [Nebuchadnezzar] withdraw from us.*” Perhaps God will do for us what he did for Hezekiah in the days of Isaiah the prophet! At that time, Jeremiah had replied with the word of the LORD that declared that Zedekiah would be given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and the city would fall – and only those who surrendered would live. **(21:1-10)** Now we hear that king Zedekiah has imprisoned Jeremiah for the answer that Jeremiah gave. Notice that

Zedekiah understands the message of Jeremiah clearly. **Verses 3-5** contain a very accurate recounting of Jeremiah's message! The city will be given over to the king of Babylon, Zedekiah will be given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, and taken captive to Babylon. In the eyes of his king Jeremiah is a traitor. Jeremiah has encouraged the people of Jerusalem to surrender – contrary to the command of Zedekiah. So he has imprisoned Jeremiah (probably to prevent him from spreading his “treason” among the people!) So Jeremiah is in a rather difficult position. Jerusalem is under siege, and he is viewed as a Babylonian sympathizer! He has already prophesied that the exile will come – and will last for 70 years. And yet, as he is sitting in the prison, the word of the LORD came to him:

1. The Obedience of Faith: Jeremiah Redeems His Cousin's Field (v6-15)

At first, this may seem like a strange word from the LORD. So far, everything in Jeremiah has been very focused on public events. But as we saw this morning, the redemption of land was a public event. And, as we saw this morning, the redemption of land is all about land and seed – and the inheritance of God's people, which depends upon the presence and the blessing of God. So when the LORD tells Jeremiah that Hanamel will come and make this request, Jeremiah would understand what it means. Hanamel has mortgaged his property, but is unable to pay the mortgage back. Therefore, Hanamel needs some family member to redeem the property.

You and I, perhaps, do not realize quite what Hanamel is asking. **Christopher Wright** summarizes the situation well: “Jeremiah was imprisoned with little prospect of release to enjoy the delights of rural husbandry. For all he knew, he might never live to see the field he was being asked to buy. The field in question was at that moment most probably being trampled by the occupying forces of Nebuchadnezzar. Any vineyards or olive trees would have been burned to the ground.

Hanamel was converting a worthless asset into ready cash by cynical manipulation of his aging relative.” (p343) Think about it. Jeremiah has no children. Jeremiah will redeem the land – for 17 shekels now. And Hanamel (or his children) will be able to redeem the land back later – after Jeremiah is dead – and the Babylonians are gone. For Hanamel this is a no lose approach. For Jeremiah, it's a no win. He's out the cash – and if he is a true prophet of Yahweh - there is no chance that he benefits from this! If it hadn't been for the word of the LORD, Jeremiah would have laughed at him! But when it happened that Hanamel came and asked Jeremiah to do this, Jeremiah knew that “*this was the word of the LORD.*” So he did it.

This is the first that we have heard of Baruch. It will not be the last! Baruch is Jeremiah's scribe, who writes down the words of his prophecies. But here Baruch is recording an ordinary purchase. But after making the purchase, Jeremiah gives a special charge to Baruch. There are two parts to this charge – both marked by “*Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel.*”

First, verse **13-14** -- God says to put these deeds in an earthenware vessel for long-term storage. (After all, it will be 70 years!) 70 years from now both Jeremiah and Baruch will be dead. But future generations will need to know that this land belongs to

Jeremiah's heirs.

And that is the point of **verse 15** – the second part of God's charge to Baruch: **15** “*For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.*” Remember that Jeremiah has already said (years before) that the exile would last for 70 years. Therefore, Jeremiah knows that it is highly unlikely that he will ever get any benefit from this purchase. He is out 17 shekels of silver (during a siege – when food is only getting more expensive).

Why does Jeremiah do this? The law of redemption was intended to ensure that the land remained in the family - so that the inheritance of Israel would remain with all the people, and not consolidated into the hands of the rich. Again, **Christopher Wright**: This was “faith in a future he would never personally see or enjoy. His was the obedience of faith. He quite literally put his money where his mouth was.... Seventeen shekels of silver were surely never better spent.” (p344)

2. The Prayer of Faith (v16-25) Jeremiah has done what God told him to do. Jeremiah understands the basic point: “*For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.*” I think that the ESV heading (Jeremiah Prays for Understanding) is misleading. It certainly led me to think that Jeremiah was asking a question at the end of **verse 25**. But Jeremiah does not ask a question! Verse 25 is a statement – it is where Jeremiah marvels at what God has done! But listen to how Jeremiah starts his prayer! Jeremiah spends three-quarters of his prayer remembering who God is, and what God has done!

a. Who Is God and What Has He Done? Where Every Prayer Should Start (v16-22)

Verse 17 starts by acknowledging that God is the creator of all things. And because God made the heavens and the earth by his great power and his outstretched arm, therefore Nothing is too hard for you. When you are praying, you need to remember that you are coming to the Creator - the one who can do anything! Too often we betray that we do not believe this - because, first, we do not pray! We do not come to God, because we think that we don't need him! And even when we do come to God, we do not stop to remember who he is!

Nothing is impossible for God - and in **verses 18-22**, we hear of the “*impossible*” things that God has done! In **verses 18-19**, Jeremiah focuses on God's character. You show steadfast love – *hesed* – to thousands (echoing the third commandment) repaying the guilt of fathers to their children after them. You might say, “Wait, we just heard in *31:29-30*, that each one dies for his own sin! How come Jeremiah now says that children pay for their fathers' sins?” Ezekiel is the one who will address this more explicitly a generation later - but the simple answer is that very often a son will inherit his father's sin - and thus, he will also inherit his father's guilt! But you can see that here in **verse 19**, as Jeremiah says that God rewards each one according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds.

Verses 18-19 express the paradox of God's love and God's justice. God shows *hesed*

covenant faithfulness. Of course, if we are covenant breakers, then how is God's "covenant faithfulness" a good thing for us? Jeremiah understands that Love and Justice come together in God.

And you see something of what this looks like in God's mighty deeds in history (**verses 20-22**): This is the standard confession of Israel. It would be like someone praying the basic outline of the Apostles' Creed - like the prayer of the disciples in **Acts 4:24-28**. If we listen to the prayers of scripture, then we will make the mighty deeds of God a regular part of our prayers. We do this for two reasons: First, because we love God. You all have heard sports fans praise their favorite players. When you love someone, you love to praise him – you delight to honor her. Even so, if you love God, you will remember his mighty deeds. And second, we recount the mighty deeds of God regularly in our prayers because it reminds us of who we are talking to! If all you do is spout off your own desires and requests, then you are saying that you do not love God – and that you do not care what he has done. Further, when you remember who God is and what God has done, then you are in a much better position to see who you are! Which is where Jeremiah turns in **verse 23**:

b. But Now You Have Made All This Disaster Come: And Then You Had Me Buy a Field! (v23-25)

Jeremiah recognizes that "*all this disaster*" (literally, "all this evil") has come upon us because our fathers did not obey your voice or walk in your law. This is the way that the children pay for their parents' sin. The reason why the world is such a mess today is because of your ancestors.

I've been reading essays that show clearly how the English and French division of the Middle East after World War 1 created much of the mess today. Of course, those essays neglected to mention that the Ottoman Empire had already created a mess before that – and the Mamelukes before that - and the Arabs before that - and the Romans and the Persians before that - and – well, we could go all the way back to the Babylonians and beyond! We have inherited a mess from our fathers - and we have only made it worse!

And so Jeremiah speaks to God of what is happening right now: **24** Behold, the siege mounds have come up to the city to take it, and because of sword and famine and pestilence the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans who are fighting against it. What you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it. We look around us and we see sword and famine and pestilence. Our enemies are winning - and what is more, "*what you spoke has come to pass, and behold, you see it.*" As you bring your prayers to God, remember that you are not giving God any new information! He already sees it. But he wants you to bring your heart to him!

And so Jeremiah brings his heart to the LORD: **25** Yet you, O Lord GOD, have said to me, "*Buy the field for money and get witnesses*"—though the city is given into the hands of the Chaldeans." This is not a question. We're being besieged by the Chaldeans. You have told me that we'll be in exile for 70 years. And yet you tell me to buy a field. Jeremiah does not ask why. He knows why! God has called him to be a sign

to Jerusalem of Yahweh's *hesed* – of his **covenant faithfulness to Israel**. And he marvels that God has given him this privilege of being an example of *hesed*. “At the very moment when the guilty past has crashed into an inescapable present, God asks Jeremiah to invest in an almost inconceivable future.” (346)

Jeremiah's redemption of Hanamel's land is a small portrait of the greater redemption wrought by Jesus on the cross. There, at Calvary, God's steadfast love and justice meet together, as “only in exercising both wrath and redemption would the Judge of all the earth, for whom nothing was too hard, do right.” (Wright, 346)

What is the point of Jeremiah's prayer? Jeremiah is teaching us what it means to believe God. To believe God means to step forward in faith and do what God says even when it seems crazy. It means to invest in a far distant future even when you cannot imagine how it will work out. Remember that Jeremiah is not married (**ch 16**). He has no children. And yet he will invest in a piece of land that he will not possess for 70 years. That requires faith! Just like it required faith for Abraham to go to a land that his heirs would not possess for 400 years. Just like it required faith for Jacob to earnestly seek the blessing of Isaac - even though it would bring him nothing in his own lifetime (because Isaac also owned no property to bequeath!). Just like it requires faith for Rex and Becca to spend their lives in the fruitless work of bringing the gospel to the T. They will spend their whole lives doing nothing more than preparing the ground for someone else – someday – to plant the seed. (We pray that God will move more quickly - but 70 years would not be unlikely. Neither would 70 years be a problem!) I said fruitless. But fruitless only in the sense that Jeremiah's redemption of the land was fruitless! Someday, according to the promise of Jesus, there will be a T church! And maybe there will be a written record of the faithful doctor and his wife who devoted their lives to preparing the ground. But maybe not. But even if there is no written record – even if there is no memory of them - their work – in the Lord – is not in vain! They have gone forth in the obedience of faith, and have labored faithfully to prepare the ground. In the midst of siege, imprisonment, and impending exile, Jeremiah marvels at the faithfulness of God!

3. The Answer of the LORD (v26-44)

a. Why Am I Bringing Disaster? Because of Their Abominations (v26-35)

The LORD answers Jeremiah's prayer. And he starts by agreeing with Jeremiah (see **verse 17**)! Yes, I am the creator of all things. Nothing is too hard for me! And then in **verses 28-29**, the LORD explains again what he will do:

And the reason for this destruction is given in verses 30-35. In **verse 30** God says that the “*children of Israel have done nothing but evil in my sight.*” This reminds us of the language of **Genesis 6**, where God says that mankind does only evil all the time. And even after the Flood, God said that the heart of man was inclined to evil from his youth (**8:21**). Notice the connection again between Land and Seed: God destroyed the world by the Flood – because of the wickedness of man (the inhabitants of the world!). Now, God will destroy Judah and Jerusalem – because of the wickedness of the people of Judah and Jerusalem.

And so God describes their rebellion and his coming judgment in **verses 31-35**: This reminds us of the central themes of chapters 2-10, how prophets, priests, kings, officials – and all the people – had turned away from the LORD their God. And, once again, after hearing God's case against Judah and Jerusalem, we find a “therefore.”

b. But “I Will Make with Them an Everlasting Covenant with Them” (v36-41)

In **verse 36**, God quotes Jeremiah's prayer (from **verse 24**). **36** “*Now therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, ‘It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by sword, by famine, and by pestilence’*: After reading **verse 36**, you would expect to find a statement of judgment, after all, **verses 26-35** has given the litany of sins that have resulted in this judgment! But that's not what you hear in **verse 37**! In Hebrew, the opening words of **verse 37** are “*Behold, I.*” Maybe we should translate it, “Behold, I myself will gather them” or perhaps, “Look at me! I will gather them” God makes clear that the covenant theology of Israel is all wrong. If Israel's hope is based on what Israel does, then Israel is doomed. Let me say that again, but a little more clearly: If your salvation is based on what you do, then you are doomed! Only God can save!

And that is God's message to Jeremiah. We saw last time that the failure of the old covenant meant that God must make a new covenant. And this covenant must be different. Because if God makes a covenant with Israel that depends on Israel's performance, then Israel has no future! So notice how everything in **verses 37-41** focuses on what God will do! “*I will gather them... I will bring them back... I will make them dwell in safety... I will give them one heart and one way... I will make with them an everlasting covenant... I will put the fear of me in their hearts... I will rejoice in doing them good... I will plant them in this land in faithfulness...*”

In **verse 27**, God had said, “*Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh Is anything too hard for me?*” Now in **verse 37**, God declares one of the impossible things that he will do! “*Behold, I will gather them...*” **Verse 38** asserts once more: “*they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*” There are two impossible things that God will do. First, he will **destroy Jerusalem** – his own city – the place where he promised his name would dwell forever. And he will do this because they have rebelled against him. And then second, he will **restore Jerusalem** - in spite of their rebellion! And that's stated clearly in the conclusion in *verses 42-44*:

c. I Will Restore Their Fortunes (v42-44)

Jeremiah does not dodge the hard questions. He does not make excuses for God. He rejects the pious platitudes so common today: “My God would never bring trouble into my life!” Jeremiah says, No, if you serve the LORD of hosts, then you serve a God who brings trouble and judgment to those who sin against him. But if you serve the LORD of hosts, then you also serve a God who restores his people and redeems them from all their trouble!

There is no way to glory – except the way of the cross. But through the cross God has

restored the fortunes of his people. And because of this, we need to invest in the far-distant future! Sure, I would love to see the T's come to faith in Jesus today! But I know – because of Jesus' promises – that they will someday! So we work toward that end. Likewise, I would love to see the church of Jesus Christ in South Bend reflecting more of the unity that Christ has called us to. And I know – because of Jesus' promises – that it will happen. So we work toward that end. And how will this happen? Just as Jeremiah was called to redeem Hanamel's land - because that's what the Law of Moses called him to do - so also, we should do what the scriptures call us to do! In our culture, it may seem strange to devote ourselves to preaching, sacraments, prayer, psalmody, Sabbath-keeping, and sharing what we have with one another. To many, these may seem as strange as the practice of redeeming land in the middle of a siege! But when you walk by faith, then you live by a different standard than those who walk by sight.

Steven Cole: The Man Who Bought Property in a War Zone

Buying property in a war zone is a high-risk investment, at best. But to buy a piece of property that is already under enemy control, when it's obvious that the enemy is on the verge of overthrowing the entire country, would be crazy. Yet that's exactly what God asked His prophet Jeremiah to do. Jerusalem was under siege, on the brink of falling to the Chaldeans. Jeremiah was in prison because he had been preaching that the nation was going to fall and that God wanted them to surrender.

By faith we must pray for God graciously to fulfill His promises, no matter how bleak the situation.

1. To pray by faith for God to fulfill His promises, we must be obedient to God's difficult commands.
2. To pray by faith for God to fulfill His promises, we must appeal to God's character.
 - A. GOD IS ALL-POWERFUL.
 - B. GOD IS GRACIOUS.
 - C. GOD IS SETTLED IN HIS WRATH AGAINST ALL SIN.
3. To pray by faith for God to fulfill His promises, we must understand God's sovereign purpose.

Conclusion

Remember, Jeremiah never lived to see those promises fulfilled. But because he believed in a sovereign God who would fulfill all of His promises to His people, Jeremiah could obey God's difficult commands and trust that God would do the humanly impossible. Through Jeremiah's prayer in this difficult and confusing situation, God granted him the understanding he needed to endure. . .

You may be in what seems to be a hopeless situation. But no matter how bleak and discouraging your circumstances, remember Jeremiah, who bought property in a war zone. By faith you can join him in laying hold of our all-powerful, gracious, holy God who will fulfill His promises on our behalf.

TEXT: Jeremiah 33:1-26

TITLE: RESTORATION GUARANTEE

BIG IDEA:

GOD GUARANTEES THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MESSIAH

INTRODUCTION:

Since we know who holds the future, we can have confidence in God's end times prophecies. Especially comforting are the words from **Jeremiah 33** at the conclusion of the short four-chapter Book of Consolation that guarantee the future restoration of both the people and the leadership of the nation of Israel. Things certainly looked bleak for the faithful but much maligned prophet Jeremiah as he languished in confinement in the capital city of Jerusalem. His words of imminent defeat at the hands of the Chaldeans had been brushed aside by false prophets and deceived rulers who were trying to mount a defense against an enemy that God was backing.

But Jeremiah was not left in the dark about God's overall redemptive agenda. The covenant-keeping Creator and Lord over all pledged His faithfulness to the promises made earlier to the patriarchs, to the priestly dynasty and to King David and his family. Despite shocking and persistent rebellion and idolatry, God's chosen people were not being cast aside forever or even replaced by some spiritual substitute – e.g. the New Testament church believers as the amillennial camp proposes.

Instead God wants us to see that **nothing is too difficult for Him** and we can trust Him supremely even when our circumstances would say otherwise. The same God who was powerful to consign Israel and Judah to captivity will prove Himself powerful to complete the restoration of both northern and southern kingdoms in the end times under the leadership of the Messiah – the perfect prophet/priest/king. Leadership is important as this passage makes clear.

Some guarantees lack credibility. But the power and trustworthiness of God Himself stands behind the bold promises made here to His undeserving people.

GOD GUARANTEES THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE MESSIAH

I. (:1-13) THE RESTORATION OF NATIONAL ISRAEL GUARANTEED

(:1-3) Setting

1. (:1) Second Prison Revelation

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard, saying,”

The setting links this chapter to the previous chapter – 2 prison revelations; We might find ourselves confined ... but God can intervene and bring His Word to bear in any circumstances. What an encouragement it must have been for Jeremiah to hear from God at this difficult time.

2. (:2) Sovereignty Undergirds Confidence in Divine Revelation

“Thus says the LORD who made the earth, the LORD who formed it to establish it, the LORD is His name,”

Words used link back to the Creation account in Genesis 1; cf. **32:17**

Mackay: this divine description is introduced here to undergird the completeness with which Jeremiah may put his trust in the Lord who wields such power and control. . . The phrase *“the Lord is his name”*, is similar to **31:35**. It is only with a confident grasp of the true identity of the one who speaks that there will be genuine reliance on the announcements he makes.

3. (:3) Special Insight Dispensed as the Situation Dictates

“Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.”

Look at the privilege and access we have to request understanding and insight in times of confusion and doubt. Unless God chooses to reveal His plans, we cannot figure them out on our own. But God delights to reveal many *“great and mighty things”* to his children. How diligently are we pursuing such insight? How valuable do we esteem God’s Word?

Thompson: The context indicates that the inaccessible things concern the future, which was beyond their understanding at that time, but when the day came they would understand (cf. **30:24**, etc.).

Mackay: Such grand vistas of the future will sustain the prophet and the people in the traumatic days that lie ahead.

Constable: The Hebrew word *besuroth* describes something made inaccessible by fortifying or enclosing it, such as a city (cf. **Numbers 13:28; Deuteronomy 3:5; Deuteronomy 28:52; Ezekiel 21:20**). The Lord’s plans for Israel were inaccessible to most people, but He would unlock some of these secrets and share them with Jeremiah in answer to the prophet’s prayer. We must ask the Lord for some things before He will give them to us (cf. **Matthew 7:7; James 4:2**).

A. (:4-9) Restored Welfare and Reputation Based on Cleansing from Sin and Forgiveness – Peace and Truth – Before and After Pictures

1. (:4-5) Before Picture -- Defeat

a. (:4) Backdrop of Enemy Invasion

“For thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the houses

of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah which are broken down to make a defense against the siege ramps and against the sword,”

Longman: The siege of Jerusalem has required that its inhabitants dismantle houses, even the palace, in order to provide defenses against the attacking Babylonians, who have raised **siege ramps** to storm the walls. But these drastic defensive measures will not prevail. God’s anger over his people’s sins and his judgment of them will render their attempts to defend themselves futile. Instead, **dead bodies** will fill up these defensive structures.

Parunak: In the face of the siege, the people have destroyed their houses for two purposes.

1) As part of the battle against the Chaldeans. Isa. 22:10 shows that this strategy was used 120 years earlier against the Assyrians: “The houses have ye broken down to fortify the wall.” Perhaps also to have something to drop on the heads of the attackers.

2) To provide burial space. Because of the siege, they can no longer take people outside of the city to bury them.

b. (:5) Backdrop of Divine Wrath and Rejection

“While they are coming to fight with the Chaldeans and to fill them with the corpses of men whom I have slain in My anger and in My wrath, and I have hidden My face from this city because of all their wickedness:”

2. (:6-9) After Picture -- Triumph

a. (:6a) Healing

“Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them;”

Cf. **30:17**

b. (:6b) Peace and Truth

“and I will reveal to them an abundance of peace and truth.”

c. (:7) Prosperity

“I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them as they were at first.”

d. (:8) Cleansing and Forgiveness

“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity by which they have sinned against Me, and I will pardon all their iniquities by which they have sinned against Me and by which they have transgressed against Me.”

Look at all the different words for sin here

Mackay: But it is not just restored economic and social well-being that is promised. The fundamental aspect of the restored land is that it is the location where there will be experienced spiritual renewal from the Lord.

Guzik – quoting **Morgan:** “Cleansing removes guilt, pollution, defilement, morally. Pardon brings the offender back into relationship of favour and fellowship. God never pardons polluted souls; He first cleanses them. Pardon, apart from the communication of purity, would perpetuate pollution, and so violate the moral order beyond remedy.”

e. (:9) Good Reputation

“It will be to Me a name of joy, praise and glory before all the nations of the earth which will hear of all the good that I do for them, and they will fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.”

B. (:10-11) Restored Worship and Rejoicing – Priorities and Thanksgiving

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Yet again there will be heard in this place, of which you say, It is a waste, without man and without beast, that is, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say,

*Give thanks to the LORD of hosts,
For the LORD is good,
For His lovingkindness is everlasting*

and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,’ says the LORD.”

Parunak:

- 1) 10, First he reminds them of the prospects for the city, humanly speaking: a ghost town, without people or animals, doors falling off their hinges, no human activity at all.
- 2) 11a, Then he calls up the vision of a bustling city, with the sounds of many different activities echoing back and forth.

C. (:12-13) Restored Wasteland and Resources – Prosperity and Tranquility

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘There will again be in this place which is waste, without man or beast, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds who rest their flocks. In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem and in the cities of Judah, the flocks will again pass under the hands of the one who numbers them,’ says the LORD.”

Geographic touchpoints indicate that this restoration would not be limited to the city of Jerusalem but would extend throughout the land.

Constable: Judah would again become a quiet and secure place where shepherds pasture their flocks. This may refer to leaders of people, not just shepherds of sheep (cf. **Jeremiah 23:1-3; Ezekiel 34:1-6; Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18**).

Parunak: Yet even physical prosperity is not the greatest blessing. The Lord reserves that for last: the nation finally enjoys the rule of its Messiah. [next paragraph]

II. (:14-26) THE RESTORATION OF THE LEADERSHIP GUARANTEED – COVENANTAL LINES OF KINGSHIP AND PRIESTHOOD FULFILLED IN THE MESSIAH

These verses (:14-26) are not found in the LXX.

A. (:14-18) Ultimate Fulfillment of the Promises Regarding Leadership

1. (:14) Days for Fulfillment are Coming

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah.’”

2. (:15) Righteous Branch of David Executing Justice and Righteousness

“In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch of David to spring forth; and He shall execute justice and righteousness on the earth.”

Parunak: “*Righteous branch*” means “legitimate scion,” cf. **30:21**, “a governor from the midst of them,” not someone in violation of **Deut. 17:15**. In connection with David, the “branch” language also recalls **Isa. 11:1**. His function is to execute judgment and righteousness.

Guzik – quoting **Harrison**: Jeremiah does not reveal as much about the coming Messiah as Isaiah does, but nevertheless provides glimpses of Christ as the Fountain of living waters (**Jeremiah 2:13**), the good Shepherd (**Jeremiah 23:4; 31:10**), the righteous Branch (**Jeremiah 23:5**), the Redeemer (**Jeremiah 50:34**), the Lord our righteousness (**Jeremiah 23:6**) and David the king (**Jeremiah 30:9**)

3. (:16) Salvation and Security of the Nation

“In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell in safety; and this is the name by which she will be called: ‘the LORD is our righteousness.’”

Thompson: The inference is that Jerusalem would so manifest the qualities of justice and righteousness (in contrast to her past bad record) that she would be worthy of such a name and exemplify the divine order for all the cities and all the people in Israel.

4. (:17-18) Continuity of the Leadership

a. (:17) Continuity of the Davidic Kingly Line

*“For **thus says the LORD**, ‘David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel;’”*

b. (:18) Continuity of the Levitical Priestly Line

“and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to prepare sacrifices continually.”

Parunak: As with the promise to Abraham, not all offspring inherit it [**the priesthood**] equally. Aaron had four sons.

1) Two, Nadab and Abihu, were destroyed before the Lord in Lev. 10 when they offered unholy fire.

2) The youngest, Ithamar, was the ancestor of Eli, whose family was cut off because of the sins of his sons.

3) The family of Eleazar, the third son, is the family of promise; **Numb. 25:12,13** records how a covenant of everlasting priesthood was confirmed with his descendant Phinehas because of his zeal for the Lord.

4) The distinction between the two lines comes to ahead under David and Solomon. David had two high priests, Abiathar (from the house of Ithamar) and Zadok (from the house of Eleazar). When Adonijah, one of David’s sons, tried to succeed David in place of Solomon, Abiathar supported him, and Solomon deposed him from the high priesthood. From that time on the Zadokite line is the proper line for priesthood. It was restored after the captivity, but through politics the priesthood left it about 170 B.C., and it never returned. The high priests of our Lord’s time were not Zadokite.

Thompson: The need for a “legitimate” priesthood was as serious as was the need for a “legitimate” ruler.

Longman: The impact of this promise of the continuation and flourishing of the kingship and the priesthood must be understood on the background of the horrible failure of these institutions in the period before the exile.

Parunak: For many, this notion of **future sacrifices** in the messianic kingdom is a stumbling block. Yet it’s clearly taught, not only here, but also in **Ezek. 43:18-27; 44:15-31**, where Zadokite priests offer burnt, sin, peace, meal, and trespass offerings. Important insight: the sacrifices in themselves never actually forgave sin. They were only symbolic, and there’s no reason that their symbolism can’t point backwards as well as forwards.

B. (:19-22) Reliability and Magnitude of the Promises Regarding Leadership

(:19) Introduction

“The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,”

1. (:20-21) Reliability -- Based on Recurring Order Established in Nature

“Thus says the LORD, ‘If you can break My covenant for the day and My covenant for the night, so that day and night will not be at their appointed time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant so that he will not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers.’”

2. (:22) Magnitude -- Based on Correlation to Innumerable Stars and Sand

“As the host of heaven cannot be counted and the sand of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.”

Feinberg: Monarchy and priesthood were the two bases of the OT theocracy. When these appeared to be most in danger of extinction in Jeremiah’s day, we find their continuance couched in sure and irrevocable terms.

C. (:23-26) Certainty of Fulfillment of the Promises Regarding Leadership

(:23) Introduction

“And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,”

1. (:24) Certainty Attacked – No Permanent Rejection

“Have you not observed what this people have spoken, saying, ‘The two families which the LORD chose, He has rejected them’? Thus they despise My people, no longer are they as a nation in their sight.”

2. (:25-26a) Certainty Attested – Patterns of Nature Bear Witness

“Thus says the LORD, ‘If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant, not taking from his descendants rulers over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’”

Parunak: It’s important for us to believe what God has revealed concerning the future history of the nation Israel. It’s even more important that we recognize that this same God has bound himself in covenant to us. We should be assured and comforted by this display of his faithfulness to Israel, because he is just as faithful to us.

Guzik: Over the **descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:** God spoke regarding the genetic descendants of Israel, not only spiritual descendants. Again, the new covenant reaches out to the whole world, not only to Israel; but it does not ignore or set aside Israel.

*“This passage has been a *crux interpretum* for expositors. It is especially difficult for those who hold an amillennial position in eschatology. The only resort for them is in allegorization of the text or the use of a dual hermeneutic.”*

(Feinberg)

3. (:26b) Certainty Affirmed – Prosperity Guaranteed

“But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.”

Mackay: The Lord will act to reverse the judgment he is rightfully imposing on his people. His grace and commitment will ensure that they will be kept as the people of God. His power is capable of reversing the most hopeless of situations, and the commitment he has given ensures that this will occur.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What approach does the Lord take towards those who scoff at His end times prophecies?
- 2) What powerful arguments can you extract from this passage that would challenge the replacement theology position that applies the fulfillment of these covenant prophecies to the church instead of national Israel? What role do NT saints play with respect to these promises?
- 3) How will the Messiah be able to implement justice and righteousness on the earth when we have never seen that consistently lived out?
- 4) What does the combination of “*peace and truth*” (vs. 6) imply to you by way of application?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable – quoting **Scalise**: The salvation announcements in **chap33** answer at least two questions left from **chap32** (and **30-31**):

- (1) How can people who persistently rebelled and even offered their children to Molech, become covenant partners with God? The LORD will heal, cleanse, and forgive them (**Jeremiah 33:6-8**) out of mercy for them (**Jeremiah 33:26**).
- (2) What will life be like for the people whom God will plant in the land? Families will grow again (**Jeremiah 33:11**), worship will resume at the temple (**Jeremiah 33:11; Jeremiah 33:18**), and God will always provide a legitimate and righteous ruler (**Jeremiah 33:14-26**), so that people can live in safety (**Jeremiah 33:16**).

All this will be accomplished by the Creator, for whom nothing is too difficult (**Jeremiah 32:17; Jeremiah 32:26**) and whose willingness and power to do good inspires awe among the nations (**Jeremiah 33:9**).

Gregg Allen: God's Message to People in Ruins

This is the second of the prison prophecies (**chp. 32-33**). In chapter 32, God promises that the people will experience judgment in being given over to the Babylonians (**32:26-35**). He repeats this promise in **33:4-5**; and the people - seeing the destruction coming - consider that God had abandoned them (**33:23-24**). But then comes this great word of promised hope and future glory.

This promise involves two stages:

- (1) the promised restoration of the nation now in judgment (**vv. 6-13**), and
- (2) the promise of the future reign of the King come from David (**vv. 14-18**).

It's 'book-ended' by a strong affirmation of the certainty of this promise:

- (1) God being able to do what He says (**vv. 1-3**), and
- (2) the creation itself serving as the promissory note (**vv. 19-26**).

I. THE GOD WHO PROMISES HOPE (**vv. 1-3**).

A. The context of the giving of this promise is Jeremiah's imprisonment (**v. 1**; see **32:1-2**).

B. The promise is made by YHWH ("*LORD*") - God's covenant name (**Ex. 3:13-14**), by which He has identified Himself as Israel's Deliverer (**v. 2**). The "*it*" speaks of His intended deliverance described in **32:36-44**. "*It*" seems like a remote possibility; but God speaks of it as if it had already been done.

C. This God invites His perplexed people to call on Him (**v. 3**). He promises to show them "*great*" and "*mighty*" (or inaccessible or hidden) things which they do not know. This God who promises has ways to bring about His plans - ways that are unknown to us, but that will be performed by Him if we call out to Him.

II. THE HOPE THAT GOD PROMISES (**vv. 4-18**).

A. The present situation seemed hopeless (**vv. 4-5**). God had promised destruction. Even though they pull down the houses to use the materials to fortify themselves against the siege works of Babylon, the places of the houses will be filled with dead bodies. This is because God will judge them in His anger.

B. But He calls His people to "*behold*" His promise in the expression of His anger (**v. 6**). He expressed hope to them in two promises:

1. That the nation will be restored to glory (**vv. 6-13**):
 - a. Healing the nation (**v. 6**).
 - b. Restoring the captives (**v. 7**).
 - c. Cleansing them of their sin (**v. 8**).
 - d. Bringing them prosperity (**v. 9**).

e. Removing the curse He had placed on them (vv. 10-11; see also 7:34; 16:9; 25:10-11).

f. Restoring the flocks (vv. 12-13).

2. That the King from David would reign (vv. 14-18).

a. The "*day is coming*" in which, in the context of the restored land, God will fulfill His promise to David (2 Sam. 7:12-16) - and then to Israel, and particularly to the house of Judah (v. 14).

b. The promise of vv. 15-16 is like that made in 23:5-6. But in this case, the focus is on the people of God. In 23:5-6, it is Messiah who is called "*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (*YHWH Tsidkenu*); but here, that name is placed on His people (see Rev. 22:3-4; also 2:17; 3:12).

c. It is asserted that David will never lack a king to sit on his throne, nor will the Levites lack a man to offer before God (vv. 17-18). These promises are fulfilled in Christ (Psalm 110:6; Heb. 7:22-25; 9:11-12; 10:11-13).

III. THE CERTAINTY OF THE HOPE PROMISED (vv. 19-26).

A. The promise is made as certain as the covenant God has made with creation (vv. 19-21; see also Gen. 8:20-22).

B. The promise is even expanded in that there will be an innumerable host of kings and priests (1 Peter 2:9-10; Rev. 1:6; 5:9-10).

C. The people, in their distress, have assumed that God had abandoned them (vv. 23-24). How untrue!! God assures them - based on the above oath that He makes, that it will happen (vv. 25-26).

* * * * *

What is the best way to respond to all this? It's to take seriously God's offer and take Him up on it:

"Call on Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (v. 3).

<http://www.bethanybible.org/biblestudy/2005/040605am.htm>

TEXT: Jeremiah 34:1-22

TITLE: OBEDIENCE MUST BE SUSTAINED

BIG IDEA:

FLASH IN THE PAN SPIRITUAL LOYALTY DOESN'T CUT IT

INTRODUCTION:

You have heard of the Christian movement called “**Promise Keepers.**” I suppose you could call this episode in Israel’s history a record of “**Promise Breakers.**” Jeremiah comes to remind the city and king of the certainty of God’s judgment because they failed to sustain their commitment to obeying the covenant. They followed the path of expediency rather than of conviction and jettisoned their half-hearted pledges when their circumstances changed.

Mackay: Chapter 34 records two incidents in the closing years of Zedekiah’s reign: a message delivered to him by Jeremiah (vv. 1-7), and a blatant example of opportunism and half-heartedness in a solemn commitment (vv. 8-22).

FLASH IN THE PAN SPIRITUAL LOYALTY DOESN'T CUT IT

I. (:1-7) FATE OF KING ZEDEKIAH SPELLED OUT

(:1) Setting

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army, with all the kingdoms of the earth that were under his dominion and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against all its cities, saying,”

Parunak: this is the initial part of the siege, when Zed still entertains hope of Egyptian help. . . (:2-3), the city will fall and Zed will be captured. God will not deliver them; the appeal to Egypt will fail.

A. (:2-3) Captured by King of Babylon

“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Go and speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and say to him: Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he will burn it with fire. You will not escape from his hand, for you will surely be captured and delivered into his hand; and you will see the king of Babylon eye to eye, and he will speak with you face to face, and you will go to Babylon.’”

Feinberg: Verse 3 discloses the fate of Zedekiah in the siege. The Lord’s message to him was that he was not to be led astray by the temporary respite in the siege; the situation was actually hopeless. As for Zedekiah, there would be no escape; he would have to face the invader (32:4). The mention of a face-to-face confrontation with

Nebuchadnezzar shows something of the fear he inspired. Zedekiah could not escape the consequences of his treason in breaking his covenant with Nebuchadnezzar. He would have to answer personally for it. This prophecy and the prophecy in Ezekiel 12:13 are reconciled by the fact that after his confrontation with Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah was blinded and taken to Babylon (52:11).

B. (:4-5) Killed – But in Peace

“Yet hear the word of the LORD, O Zedekiah king of Judah! Thus says the LORD concerning you, ‘You will not die by the sword. You will die in peace; and as spices were burned for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so they will burn spices for you; and they will lament for you, Alas, lord! For I have spoken the word,’ declares the LORD.”

Constable: The people of Judah would lament Zedekiah’s death by burning spices, a traditional way of expressing grief (cf. **Jeremiah 22:18; 2 Chronicles 16:14; 2 Chronicles 21:19**). Yahweh promised this to the king. The Babylonians evidently permitted the Judeans in exile to mourn the death of their king in this way.

Parunak: Zed will not die by the sword, but will be buried with royal honors. Contrast the treatment of Jehoiakim, **22:18-19**, and the general treatment of those remaining in the city when it falls, **21:7**.

(:6-7) Setting Repeated

“Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the remaining cities of Judah, that is, Lachish and Azekah, for they alone remained as fortified cities among the cities of Judah.”

II. (:8-16) FREEDOM FOR JEWISH SLAVES COMMANDED AND ONLY TEMPORARILY OBEYED

A. (:8-11) Cycle of Rebellion

(:8) Introduction

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were in Jerusalem to proclaim release to them:”

1. (:9) Command = Free Jewish Slaves

“that each man should set free his male servant and each man his female servant, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman; so that no one should keep them, a Jew his brother, in bondage.”

Thompson: It may have been a matter of convenience since slaves had to be fed and could no longer be used for work in the fields. Moreover, the men were needed for the defense of the city. Some owners may have had nobler motives and wished to comply with the law.

2. (:10) Initial Obedience

“And all the officials and all the people obeyed who had entered into the covenant that each man should set free his male servant and each man his female servant, so that no one should keep them any longer in bondage; they obeyed, and set them free.”

3. (:11) Relapse

“But afterward they turned around and took back the male servants and the female servants whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection for male servants and for female servants.”

Parunak: This episode shows us very clearly the difference between inward and outward submission to the Lord, between obeying in the flesh and in the spirit. The fear of siege forced the Jews into an outward obedience, but in their hearts they never accepted the Lord’s authority, and as soon as the threat was gone, they lapsed back into their old conduct. What God wants is yielded hearts that accept his rule without compulsion.

Longman: They did not follow through on their commitment to do the right thing; they betrayed their covenantal agreement.

Feinberg: The incident has been aptly called “panic piety” (so **Lewis**). Recall how often the eighth-century prophets Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, and Amos denounced social injustices against slaves. To reimpose slavery on those who had been freed showed that the covenant had not been motivated by compassion, justice, and obedience to the Lord’s command.

B. (:12-16) Covenant Transgressions

(:12) Introduction

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,”

1. (:13-14) Covenant Ratified and Broken

a. (:13) Ratification

“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘I made a covenant with your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, saying,’

b. (:14a) Regulations

“At the end of seven years each of you shall set free his Hebrew brother who has been sold to you and has served you six years, you shall send him out free from you;”

c. (:14b) Relapse

“but your forefathers did not obey Me or incline their ear to Me.”

2. (:15-16) Covenant Obeyed and Then Profaned

a. (:15) Covenant Obeyed

“Although recently you had turned and done what is right in My sight, each man proclaiming release to his neighbor, and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name.”

b. (:16) Covenant Profaned

“Yet you turned and profaned My name, and each man took back his male servant and each man his female servant whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your male servants and female servants.”

Stedman: The remarkable phrase in this passage is, "you profaned my name." This was a serious charge to any Jew. They had been brought up to revere and respect the name of God. The scribes did not even dare to write the name of God without taking a bath and changing their clothes. And they never pronounced it. The four Hebrew letters used for the name of God they called "The Ineffable Tetragrammaton" -- the unpronounceable or unspeakable four letters. They never spoke the name of God. Yet God's charge against this king is, "You have profaned my name." The Hebrew word translated profane, means "wound," "pierce," or "deface." God's charge is, "You have defaced me." How did Zedekiah do it? By failing to respect the human rights of slaves. It is an act of blasphemy against God to treat another person as somewhat less than a person. That is what God holds a nation to account for.

III. (:17-22) FATE OF COVENANT BREAKERS SPELLED OUT

A. (:17) Boomerang Threat Due to Covenant Breaking

1. (:17a) Release Ignored

“Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘You have not obeyed Me in proclaiming release each man to his brother and each man to his neighbor.’”

2. (:17b) Release Promised

“Behold, I am proclaiming a release to you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to the sword, to the pestilence and to the famine; and I will make you a terror to all the kingdoms of the earth.’”

Longman: God will give them freedom though they did not grant freedom to the slaves. But this is a freedom they will not want. It is a freedom to fall by sword, plague, and famine.

B. (:18-21) Backsliders Punished

1. (:18-20) Punished for Breaking the Covenant

“I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not fulfilled the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when

they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts— the officials of Judah and the officials of Jerusalem, the court officers and the priests and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf— I will give them into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life. And their dead bodies will be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth.”

Constable: The Lord would give all the people who had broken the covenant, regardless of their social position, into the hand of their enemy. They would die without the privilege of a burial; birds and beasts would consume their carcasses (cf. **Jeremiah 7:33; Jeremiah 16:4; Jeremiah 19:7; Deuteronomy 28:26**). They had used a typical covenant-making ritual. They had cut a young calf in two and the parties of the covenant passed between the halves (cf. **Genesis 15:10; Genesis 15:17**).

2. (:21) Punished by Their Enemies

“Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials I will give into the hand of their enemies and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon which has gone away from you.”

C. (:22) Burning and Devastation in Store for Jerusalem and Cities of Judah

“Behold, I am going to command,’ declares the LORD, ‘and I will bring them back to this city; and they will fight against it and take it and burn it with fire; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant.”

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How seriously do we take the commitments we make to the Lord?
- 2) What level of importance does the Lord place on freedom and how are we promoting freedom in our society?
- 3) How was the institution of slavery different in biblical times from what we are familiar with today?
- 4) Why is God’s punishment as described in this passage so severe?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Gregg Allen: Hard Words to a Fickle King

I. PROPHECY #1: ZEDEKIAH WARNED THAT THE CITY WOULD BE TAKEN (vv. 1-7)

A. The context of this first prophecy was the siege of Babylon. Babylon had taken all but three fortified cities of Judah (v. 7); but as they had surrounded Jerusalem, they became threatened by the armies of Pharaoh and temporarily withdrew the siege (37:1-5).

B. At the time of the withdrawal, God spoke through Jeremiah and let Zedekiah know that the Babylonians would return and the city would still be taken captive (37:6-10). It was this prophetic word - probably given just prior to the temporary Babylonian withdrawal - that was being asserted to Zedekiah (vv. 1-3). Though the king of Babylon would be drawn back, Zedekiah would still be made to stand before him face to face (2 Kings 25:5-7).

C. Yet, in the midst of this warning, God gives Zedekiah this promise. He would not die by the sword, but die in peace in Babylon. He would be mourned by his people in ceremony like kings before him had been mourned (such as Asa in 2 Chron. 16:13-14, but unlike Jehoram in 2 Chron. 21:19-20).

D. The mention of the timing of this prophecy - apparently "*when the king of Babylon's army fought against Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah that were left*" (vv. 6-7) - is meant to set the context for the next prophetic word to Zedekiah. Zedekiah was apparently moved by this promise - but, sadly, not moved to genuine repentance.

II. PROPHECY #2: ZEDEKIAH JUDGED FOR TURNING BACK ON HIS PROMISE (vv. 8-22).

A. Perhaps the warning from Jeremiah had some effect on Zedekiah, and moved him to make some resolves in the hopes that God would still show favor to him. He made a covenant with the people of Jerusalem who still remained: that they should set free all from among the Hebrew people who had been made slaves - probably as a result of indebtedness (vv. 8-10).

1. This was a matter of simply keeping the command of God's law - which had apparently been neglected. The law of God had commanded that all people from among their own countrymen would be released from their debts every seven years (Deut. 15:1-6; 12-18). This command included a promise of blessing on the nation if it was obeyed.

2. All of the ruling class entered into this covenant that Zedekiah commanded. They even solemnized the act by a ceremonial 'cutting' of a calf in two and passing between the parts (vv. 18-19). This was a way of pledging themselves to this covenant that was first seen in Genesis 15:8-17). It was a way of saying that, if they should break this covenant, may they be slain and their blood poured out as this calf's.

3. This may have even been motivated out of a desire to have enough "*free people*" to be available to put up some kind of defense against the Babylonians.

B. But it may have been that, after they saw that the Babylonians had withdrawn, that they "changed their minds", and made the slaves return to their state of slavery (v. 11). This moved God, through Jeremiah, to give this second word of prophecy (vv. 12-22):

1. He reminded the people of Judah of the covenant He had made with them after He had delivered them out of slavery - a covenant that they had failed to keep (vv. 13-14).
2. They had recently obeyed; but then they turned around and "*profaned*" God's name by bringing back the slaves (vv. 15-16).
3. Therefore, God proclaims liberty to them - that is, liberty to be given over to the sword, pestilence and famine; and to captivity to Babylon (vv. 17-22).

Peter Wallace: Halfway Repentance Is Not Enough

a. The First Word – Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed and You Will Be Taken Captive (v1-7)

Verses 6-7 give a very clear timestamp for this oracle. Lachish and Azekah are the only fortified cities in Judah that remain in Jewish hands. The armies of Babylon are drawing near. The countryside is overrun. The fortified cities and villages are ruined. The onrushing tide of the nations has flooded all the land. Only Lachish, Azekah, and Jerusalem still stand as islands amidst the raging sea. Lachish and Azekah guarded the two main roads to Jerusalem. Together they form a triangle that protects the hill country of Judah. If one falls, then there is nothing to stop the Babylonian army.

The "*Lachish letters*" are pieces of clay pots with messages inscribed on them – they come from the early 6th century – during the Babylonian siege. One of them signals the coming of the end: "*Let my lord know that we are watching over the beacon of Lachish, according to the signals which my lord gave, for Azekah is not seen.*" So Jeremiah's message to Zedekiah comes just before that message from Lachish.

Lachish had been the last city to fall to Sennacherib a century earlier. That Assyrian Siege of Lachish is commemorated in the great palace of Sennacherib – with a whole room devoted to a carving of the great siege. But for Judah, the Siege of Lachish was important – because it was the last battle that Sennacherib won! In the days of Hezekiah, in the days of the prophet Isaiah, the LORD delivered Jerusalem from the Assyrians, and saved his anointed king from his foes!

As Zedekiah watches out over the beacons of Lachish and Azekah no doubt he was praying that God would deliver the son of David once more! Remember your covenant with David! Do not forget your anointed king! But Jeremiah arrives to tell him that the LORD decrees the destruction of the city. Nebuchadnezzar will burn the city of Jerusalem with fire. Zedekiah himself will die in peace – but the city will not be spared. What does Jeremiah mean "*You shall die in peace*"? We will hear the conclusion of the story in **chapter 39**. Zedekiah indeed saw Nebuchadnezzar face to face. His sons were slaughtered before him. That was the last thing that Zedekiah ever saw. Then Nebuchadnezzar put out Zedekiah's eyes, and took him captive to Babylon. So it is true: "*You shall not die by the sword.*" Your eyes will be gouged out and you will die in captivity in Babylon! That may seem like a strange way to "*die in peace*"! That doesn't sound like "shalom"! Some have suggested that there is an implied "if" here – namely, if you hear the word of the LORD (and thus surrender to Nebuchadnezzar), then you will die in peace. After all, in **chapter 21**, Jeremiah had said to Zedekiah and all the

people that if they surrender, they will live, but if they fight, they will die. The solution is found in Zedekiah's own understanding of what Jeremiah says.

In **chapter 32, verse 4**, we heard Zedekiah ask: *“Why do you prophesy... Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye. And he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I visit him, declares the LORD.”* **Chapter 32** was quoting from **chapter 34**! Zedekiah was quoting from this prophecy when he said that. 4 (After all, Jeremiah was in prison in **chapter 32**). Zedekiah interprets the prophecy to mean that he will be taken captive to Babylon – and then restored to the throne (“until I visit him”). But the second half of **Jeremiah 34** provides a different interpretation. Look down to **verse 20-21**. The people of Jerusalem will be destroyed – their dead bodies given to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. But Zedekiah will be given into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. Compared to the fate of the people, Zedekiah will get off easy. But what should we make of the funeral reference in **verse 5**? And as spices were burned for your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so people shall burn spices for you and lament for you, saying, *“Alas, lord!”* For Zedekiah, this means that there will be a people left to lament over him! The practice in Israel was to bury the king, and then to have a funeral fire – burning spices as a sweet aroma. Just a comment here: verse 5 does not require us to burn spices at funerals! But it does recognize the value of funeral customs. Scripture does not command particular funeral practices. But scripture does commend the practice of giving honor to the deceased.

b. The Second Word – Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (v8-22)

i. You Enslaved Your Brothers Again??! (v8-16)

Verses 8-16 then give a heartbreaking example of Judah's faithlessness. In the Law of Moses, God had made it clear that Israelites were not supposed to enslave each other. In **verse 14**, Jeremiah paraphrases **Exodus 21:2** and **Deuteronomy 15:12**. God had set his people free from slavery in Egypt. Therefore, God's people should not enslave each other! Yes, there may be situations where a person runs into trouble, and rather than starve to death, they may sell themselves into slavery. But in modern terms we would call it “indentured service” – because it was only for a term of six years. And after six years, you must set him free. Under King Zedekiah the people of Jerusalem obeyed the LORD's command! They obeyed and set their slaves free. But then they turned around and brought them back into subjection again. What went wrong? The law of the Sabbatical year was intimately connected with the law of the Jubilee – the 50th year, when land would be restored to its rightful owners. If the Jubilee year has been ignored for hundreds of years, and land has gradually been accumulated in the hands of the wealthy, then what will happen when the slaves are set free? They have no land to return to. Their land is still in the hands of their former masters! If I am one of the freed slaves, what am I supposed to do? So, yes, the officials of Jerusalem freed their slaves – but under such conditions that the slaves were forced back into slavery again! After all, there were two different times (a decade apart) when Nebuchadnezzar invaded. Perhaps it was during the first invasion that they freed the slaves – and then as soon as Nebuchadnezzar went home, they forced them back. Freeing the slaves only works if

the Jubilee principle of the land is honored! Obviously there are lots of differences between the OT situation and the American Civil War. Land ownership worked differently – and slavery worked differently! And for that matter, it was not southern slaveholders who freed their slaves – but President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation! Perhaps this is why Zedekiah will be allowed to die in peace in Babylon! Very few slaveholding rulers have ever emancipated their own slaves. Usually they are forced to do it by others! But Zedekiah tried – maybe only half-heartedly – maybe it didn’t really work – but unlike everyone else, he tried!

ii. Therefore I Proclaim Liberty to the Sword: All the Curses from Abraham to Goliath Will Now Come upon You (v17-22)

Verses 17-22 then speak of what God will do to the people who disobeyed him. Since they failed to proclaim liberty to their brothers, God will proclaim to them liberty to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine. They wanted it to look like they were obeying God – but they refused to do the hard thing of giving the freed slaves the resources to stay out of slavery! They wanted to look good by freeing their slaves, but they also wanted to hold on to the land that their fathers had taken from others. And the result is that God makes the cities of Judah “*a desolation without inhabitant.*” I’ve summarized this as “*all the curses from Abraham to Goliath will now come upon you.*”

When it says “*make a covenant*” in Hebrew the word is to cut. The way you make a covenant is by cutting animals in half and walking between the animals together. The picture of “*cutting a covenant*” goes back to **Genesis 15** – and here in **verse 19**, Jeremiah reminds them of what the picture means. When you walk between the parts of the calf you are saying “*may I be cut in half if I do not do what I promise today.*” In **Genesis 15**, God alone walked between the pieces of the animal. God has promised – and he will do what he has promised. But now God has called Israel to be faithful – to walk before him and be blameless. At Sinai Israel had promised to obey God and walk according to all the words of his law. In the book of Deuteronomy, God laid out the blessings of the covenant for obedience – and the curses of the covenant for disobedience. Indeed, bodies being fed to the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the earth goes all the way back to the curses of **Dt 28** – but in the context of the curse upon the son of David, it would also cause people to remember what Goliath had said to David. And the particular reason given here in **chapter 34** is because they have mistreated the poor.

Longman: We need to remember that in its ancient context this type of slavery was an alternative to debtors’ prisons or abject poverty. If such a relationship were conducted in a proper fashion, it could have been a positive societal institution, a temporary state to help individuals and families get back on their feet. But as far we know it was never enacted in such an enlightened way. It was then, as in more recent days, an oppressive and exploitative institution.

Ray Stedman: **Chapters 34-39** of Jeremiah are a series of historical flashbacks. That is, they do not come in any chronological order here, but the prophet is looking back over his ministry, gathering up certain incidents which have not been reported to us before.

They constitute a revelation of what God requires of a nation. We will see dramatized in each chapter the failure of Judah to meet a requirement of God relative to the national life.

Chapter 34 goes back to the time of the second invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, after Jehoiachin (otherwise known as Coniah) had been taken captive to Babylon, and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was made a vassal king under Nebuchadnezzar. The Chaldean (Babylonian) army is approaching the city of Jerusalem once again, and Jeremiah is sent to the king with a message -- yet another prediction of defeat at the hands of Babylon. Apparently Zedekiah was frightened at the approach of the Babylonian army, so he began seeking ways to placate God, so that God would feel more kindly toward him and perhaps spare him.

This is a common phenomenon. I have often observed this in people, and have been guilty of it myself. When trouble strikes, people will often start going to church for the first time in years, thinking that is what God wants. Or they will start tithing, or paying their debts, or doing something else they hope will somehow make God feel a little more favorable toward them, as this king sought to do. He issued a royal edict that all the household slaves of Judah should be released from bondage.

If you look back in the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, you find that the law required that slaves -- Jewish people who had hired themselves out as servants and slaves -- were to work but six years and the seventh year were to be freed. No Jew could be in servitude more than six years. They could resume the contract if they wished, but they had freedom to choose. No Jew could hold a brother as a permanent slave.

Over the years this law had fallen into disuse, and the people had gotten used to having these permanent slaves in their households. The king evidently felt this upset God, so he issued the edict that the slaves be released. In chapter 37, which was written at the same time, we learn that Egypt sent an army up against Jerusalem to meet the Babylonian army. When the Chaldeans heard that Pharaoh of Egypt was coming up against them, they left the siege of Jerusalem and went out to meet the Egyptians. And when King Zedekiah saw that the Babylonian army had withdrawn, he immediately rescinded his orders to release the slaves. So God sent Jeremiah to him with a new message,

Dr. Tony Evans: You cannot be free without restrictions. A fish is not free to roam the jungle. It wasn't made for that. A lion is not free to live in the ocean, because it wasn't made for that. Freedom is having the benefits accrue to you that you were created to receive. Freedom doesn't mean there are no boundaries. Freedom means that within the right boundaries you can maximize your potential

Edward Gibbon: Are we a nation about to die? Edward Gibbon in his book "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" listed five major causes for the decline of the Roman Empire:

1. The disintegration or the breakdown of the family unit and the increase of divorce.

2. The increase and rise and burden of taxes and extravagant spending.
3. The even increasing desire for pleasure and entertainment even if it meant killing people.
4. The continual production of armaments and outfitting of legions to face the ever-increasing threat of enemy attacks.
5. The decay of religion, honor, decency and the ever increasing manifestation of bizarre religious practices that left the people without a uniform faith.

TEXT: Jeremiah 35:1-19

TITLE: THE PRIORITY OF OBEYING GOD

BIG IDEA:

OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY MUST ALWAYS BE TO OBEY GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Scriptures frequently use the type of argument fleshed out in this passage: arguing from the lesser to the greater. If you are careful to keep your word and commitments made to human authorities, how much more critical is your faithfulness to God? Jeremiah is instructed by God to stage a specific scenario that would help to drive home this lesson to the unrepentant and unfaithful nation. Certainly we have such abundant access to God's revelation and to good teaching that we have a high degree of accountability when it comes to listening to and obeying the truth of the Word.

OUR HIGHEST PRIORITY MUST ALWAYS BE TO OBEY GOD

I. (:2-11) CASE STUDY OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE RECHABITES

(:1) Setting

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying,”

A. (:2-5) Test Case Scenario

1. (:2) Engage the Rechabites

“Go to the house of the Rechabites and speak to them, and bring them into the house of the LORD, into one of the chambers, and give them wine to drink.”

Adam Clarke: The Rechabites were not descendants of Jacob; they were Kenites, **1 Chronicles 2:55**, a people originally settled in that part of Arabia Petroea, called the land of Midian; and most probably the descendants of Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses. Compare **Numbers 10:29-32**, with **Judges 1:16; Judges 4:11**.

Those mentioned here seem to have been a tribe of Nomades or Scenite Arabs, who fed their flocks in the deserts of Judea; they preserved the simple manners of their ancestors, considering the life of the inhabitants of cities and large towns as the death of liberty; believing that they would dishonor themselves by using that sort of food that would oblige them to live a sedentary life. Jonadab, one of their ancestors, had required his children and descendants to abide faithful to the customs of their forefathers; to continue to live in tents, and to nourish themselves on the produce of their flocks; to abstain from the cultivation of the ground, and from that particularly of the vine and its produce. His descendants religiously observed this rule, till the time when the armies of the Chaldeans had entered Judea; when, to preserve their lives, they retired within the walls of Jerusalem. But even there we find, from the account in this chapter, they did

not quit their frugal manner of life: but most scrupulously observed the law of Jonadab their ancestor, and probably of this family.

Longman: The Rechabites seem to consider the lifestyle of the nomad as appropriate to their religious expression. It may be that they equated the settled agricultural lifestyle too close to that of Baal worshipping Canaanites.

Walkwiththeword.org -- Why do you suppose God commanded Jeremiah to bring them into the Temple? In order for their example to be witnessed by the priests, leaders, and people most closely associated with the temple. In other words, to provide a right spiritual example to those who thought of themselves as the right spiritual example but were not.

2. (:3-5) Entice Them to Drink Wine

a. (:3-4) Gathering the Key Players

“Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites, and I brought them into the house of the LORD, into the chamber of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God, which was near the chamber of the officials, which was above the chamber of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the doorkeeper.”

The name Jaazaniah means “*the Lord hearkens*”.

The name Habazziniah may mean “*lamp of the Lord*”.

The name Hanan means gracious or merciful; Maaseiah means “*work of the Lord*”.

Constable: Jaazaniah was evidently the leader of the clan at this time. The reference to Hanan ben Igdaliah as "the man of God" probably identifies him as a prophet, though it could simply mean that he was a godly man. His "sons" may have been his disciples. He appears to have been an ally of Jeremiah. Maaseiah was probably the father of Zephaniah the priest (cf. **Jeremiah 21:1; Jeremiah 29:25; Jeremiah 37:3**). His position as doorkeeper of the temple, of which there were three, was an important one; those who held it received special punishment when the Babylonians took Jerusalem (cf. **Jeremiah 52:24-27; 2 Kings 25:18-21**).

b. (:5) Giving Them Wine to Drink

“Then I set before the men of the house of the Rechabites pitchers full of wine and cups; and I said to them, ‘Drink wine!’”

Parunak: Consider how strong Jer’s invitation to drink wine in vv. 1-5 must have seemed. Jer is a true prophet. He can tell them truthfully that God sent him to offer them wine. The offer takes place in the temple in the residence of the priests, and in particular a family known as stemming from a “*man of God*” (v. 4). Probably, the wine itself was that offered by the people for the maintenance of the priests. Surely, if ever there were a set of circumstances calculated to lead them away from their commitment, this was it. Yet they trust their own judgment over that of priest and prophet. They are individually responsible for their conduct.

Mackay: The bowls were large containers from which the individual drinking cups would be filled. Jeremiah in his own name invites them to drink so that it is not just a matter of refusing wine set before them, but of spurning the hospitality extended to them by the prophet in such a fine setting. The Rechabites were being put on the spot as regards where their loyalties lay.

B. (:6-11) Testimony of Faithfulness

1. (:6-7) Commitment to Obedience

“But they said, ‘We will not drink wine, for Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, You shall not drink wine, you or your sons, forever. You shall not build a house, and you shall not sow seed and you shall not plant a vineyard or own one; but in tents you shall dwell all your days, that you may live many days in the land where you sojourn.’”

Parunak: Jonadab lived in the time of Jehu (**2 Kings 10**), some 250 years before. That’s longer than the entire history of the US. Most of us can’t even name an ancestor that far back, let alone pretend to be following his instructions.

2. (:8-10) Consistent Track Record of Obedience

“We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, in all that he commanded us, not to drink wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons or our daughters, nor to build ourselves houses to dwell in; and we do not have vineyard or field or seed. We have only dwelt in tents, and have obeyed and have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.”

Guzik: The sons of Jonadab passed the test and refused the wine. The public nature of the ceremony, the presence of their entire clan, and prominence of the prophet, the proximity of the temple all added pressure to drink the wine. They also had the prior exception of coming into the city and leaving their nomadic life for a period; if that was an exception, it would be easy to make more. Yet they did not and were faithful.

3. (:11) Crisis Relocation to Jerusalem

“But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against the land, we said, ‘Come and let us go to Jerusalem before the army of the Chaldeans and before the army of the Arameans.’ So we have dwelt in Jerusalem.”

Adam Clarke: If at present we appear to be acting contrary in any respect to our institutions, in being found in the city, necessity alone has induced us to take this temporary step. We have sought the shelter of the city for the preservation of our lives; so now we dwell at Jerusalem.

Constable: The only time they lived in a city was when Nebuchadnezzar's vassals invaded the Judean countryside. Then they moved into the city for protection out of necessity, for survival, not because they had abandoned their principles. Jerusalem was not under siege at this time, but the surrounding countryside was being invaded.

II. (:12-19) CONTRASTING UNFAITHFULNESS OF JERUSALEM AND JUDAH

(:12) Introduction

"Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying,"

A. (:13-16) Priority of Obeying the Lord

(:13a) Introduction:

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, 'Go and say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem,'"

1. (:13b-14) Priority Based on the Commanding Authority – Why Do You Obey Jonadab and Not the Lord?

"'Will you not receive instruction by listening to My words?' declares the LORD. The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed. So they do not drink wine to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. But I have spoken to you again and again; yet you have not listened to Me."

Wiersbe: How often God's people are put to shame by the devotion and discipline of people who don't even know the Lord but who are intensely loyal to their family, their religion, or their personal pursuits. Even people who want nothing to do with the Word of God can be loyal to traditions and man-made codes. If Christians were putting into their spiritual walk the kind of discipline that athletes put into their chosen sport, the church would be pulsating with revival life.

2. (:15) Priority Based on the Persistent Sending of Prophets – Why Do You Not Respond to Repeated Warnings?

"Also I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, sending them again and again, saying: 'Turn now every man from his evil way and amend your deeds, and do not go after other gods to worship them. Then you will dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your forefathers; but you have not inclined your ear or listened to Me.'"

Walkwiththeword.org -- What is different about HOW instructions were given to each of these opposing examples? In **v.14** the clear implication is that Jonadab only needed to speak his commands once and they were faithfully obeyed; God spoke over and over and over again the same things to His people through a variety of means and was repeatedly ignored.

3. (:16) Conclusion: You Have Your Priorities Mixed Up

“Indeed, the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have observed the command of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to Me.”

B. (:17) Pronouncement of Judgment on Judah for Unfaithfulness

“Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘Behold, I am bringing on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the disaster that I have pronounced against them; because I spoke to them but they did not listen, and I have called them but they did not answer.’”

Mackay: Disaster is the inevitable consequence of continued disobedience in the face of direct divine instructions as to how they should live, and also in the face of repeated divine remonstrance and entreaty that they had go things wrong and should repent before it became too late.

C. (:18-19) Promise of Permanent Relationship with Descendants of Jonadab for Their Faithfulness

“Then Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Because you have obeyed the command of Jonadab your father, kept all his commands and done according to all that he commanded you; therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me always.’”

The issue is not the Lord advocating abstinence from alcoholic beverages but rather the faithfulness of this particular family clan to obey the commands of their patriarch.

Thompson: The phrase “*stand before Yahweh*” is frequently used of men who serve Yahweh in some way but particularly in the priestly service in the temple (7:10; 15:19; Deut. 4:10; 10:8; 1 K. 17:1; 18:15; 2 K. 3:14).

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Do we place a higher priority on obeying God and His commands which impact the heart and our eternal destiny or on obeying the commands of some human authority which concern external matters and lack the same impact?
- 2) Are we sensitive to repeated warnings from the Lord or does our conscience become cold and calloused?
- 3) Are we living for eternity and motivated by eternal rewards or more interested in our comfort and enjoyment of this present life?
- 4) Do we follow thru on our commitments to the Lord and persevere in faithfulness?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Structure of 34-39

Four stories symmetrically arranged, with an epilog describing the fall of the city:

	<u>King</u>	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Lesson</u>
a) 34	Zed	Covenant	Imperfect obedience
b) 35	J'kim	Rechabites	Perfect obedience
c) 36	J'kim	Scroll	Consistent Persecution
d) 37f	Zed	Prison	Inconsistent Persecution
e) 39	Neb		

Basic overview: Jer invites a certain family into one of the temple chambers for a glass of wine. They refuse, because it violates their family laws. The Lord then uses them as an object lesson, contrasting their faithfulness to their traditions with Israel's unfaithfulness to the divine law.

The episode with the Rechabites occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim, 10 or more years before Zed's abortive covenant in the previous chapter, but the juxtaposition of the two here invites us to compare that covenant in particular with what happened with the Rechabites.

Constable: quoting **Feinberg** – Notice the telling **contrasts** between the Rechabites and Judah.

1. The Rechabites obeyed a fallible leader (**Jeremiah 35:14**); Judah's leader was the eternal God (cf. **Malachi 1:6**).
2. Jonadab gave his commands to the Rechabites only once; God repeatedly sent his messages to his people (**Jeremiah 35:15**).
3. The restrictions that bound the Rechabites did not deal with eternal issues; God's messages to his people had eternal as well as temporal implications.
4. The Rechabites obeyed the commands of Jonadab for about three hundred years; the Lord's people constantly disobeyed (**Jeremiah 35:16**).
5. The loyalty of the Rechabites would be rewarded; for their disloyalty God's people would be punished (**Jeremiah 35:17**).

Guzik: Contrasts:

- The Rechabites obeyed a fallible leader; the people of Judah disobeyed the eternal God.
- The Rechabites received their command only once from their leader and obeyed; the people of Judah received their command from God again and again and still disobeyed.
- The Rechabites obeyed regarding earthly things; the people of Judah disobeyed in regard to eternal things.

- The Rechabites obeyed their leader's commands over about 300 years; the people of Judah continually disobeyed their God.
- The Rechabites would be rewarded; the people of Judah would be judged.

TEXT: Jeremiah 36:1-32

TITLE: SCROLL OF CALAMITY

BIG IDEA:

GOD'S MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT CANNOT BE ERASED OR DENIED

INTRODUCTION:

Accountability can be a sore subject for those who do not want to face up to the consequences of their actions. When hit with a prophecy of impending divine judgment, people resort to the standard defense mechanisms:

- Deny the reality of the message
- Question the source or authority of the message
- Attack the messenger
- Ignore the message
- Oppose the message in any way possible

But here we will see the futility of trying to cut out the portions of God's Word we don't want to obey; the futility of trying to burn the Word of God; the futility of trying to attack God's messengers.

Parunak: How do you react to bad news? Say, the message that you have been declared a political enemy and the government is looking for you. You may mourn over it; you may take steps to avoid capture. One thing doesn't make sense: shoot the messenger and deny the message. Yet many people take exactly that action when they hear God's condemnation of their sin. Instead of acting responsibly on that information, they deny it and reject the messenger. Today, we learn of a Hebrew king who acted just that way.

GOD'S MESSAGE OF JUDGMENT CANNOT BE ERASED OR DENIED

I. (:1-19) SCROLL OF CALAMITY WRITTEN, READ AND REPORTED – APART FROM REPENTANCE, CALAMITY IS COMING

(:1) Setting

“In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,”

People don't want to believe calamity is coming. They close their ears to the warnings from God's Word. They assume that all things will continue on just as they have been for the past decades.

A. (:2-4) Scroll of Calamity Written

1. (:2) Preparation of the Scroll

“Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day.”

Guzik: God commanded Jeremiah to do this so that the message might be more effectively delivered. If the word was present in written form it could be more easily remembered, consulted, and meditated upon.

Mackay: The papyrus was fairly narrow, about 10 inches (25 cm) high, and would be rolled lengthwise on two pieces of wood. Scrolls could be up to 30 feet (9 m) long. The writing would be in columns of a standard width and would run from top to bottom and right to left. The scroll would be read as the papyrus was rolled off the left stick onto the right one.

2. (:3) Purpose of the Scroll

*“Perhaps the house of Judah will hear **all the calamity** which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin.”*

Clarke: This was still almost 20 years before the final conquest of Jerusalem, and it was still possible to see God rescue Judah. It was yet possible to avert the judgments which had been so often denounced against them. But in order to this they must:

- Hear what God has spoken.
- Every man turn from his evil way.
- If they do so, God graciously promises to forgive their iniquity and their sin.

3. (:4) Process of Dictation and Writing on the Scroll

“Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him.”

B. (:5-10) Scroll of Calamity Read

1. (:5-7) Commissioning of Baruch to Deliver the Message

a. (:5) Limitation on Jeremiah’s Movements

“Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, ‘I am restricted; I cannot go into the house of the LORD.’”

Guzik: It appears that Jeremiah was excommunicated from the Temple because of his outspoken comment in his Temple Sermon (**Jeremiah 5**, cf. **Jeremiah 7:26**). The word ‘debarred’ (‘shut up’, AV [KJV]) could indicate ritual defilement, but this was usually for a limited period.

b. (:6) Delegation to Baruch of Responsibility to Deliver the Message

“So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD’s house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities.”

Mackay: The whole people and not just the king and his courtiers were to be challenged with the message, because nothing less was at stake than the continuing existence of the nation. So it is addressed not just to the townspeople of Jerusalem, but to those from the surrounding districts who have gathered for this special act of worship in the Temple.

- c. (:7) Supplication and Repentance Needed to Avoid Divine Wrath
“Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people.”

2. (:8-10) Carrying out of the Responsibility to Read the Prophetic Message

- a. (:8) Baruch Reads the Scroll
“Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the book the words of the LORD in the LORD’S house.”

Guzik: It is difficult to know if this was the reading of the scroll first described in **Jeremiah 36:8** or a second public reading of the scroll some weeks or months later.

- b. (:9) People Assembled in Jerusalem for a Fast
“Now in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD.”
- c. (:10) Baruch Reads the Scroll – **(READING #1)**
“Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD’S house, to all the people.”

Longman: it appears that Gemariah is part of a circle of powerful families that have had a close tie to the prophet (and likely to Josiah’s earlier reforms).

C. (:11-19) Scroll of Calamity Reported to the Officials

1. (:11-13) Micaiah

“Now when Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan,, had heard all the words of the LORD from the book, he went down to the king’s house, into the scribe’s chamber. And behold, all the officials were sitting there—Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard when Baruch read from the book to the people.”

2. (:14-19) Baruch (READING #2)

a. (:14-15) Reading of the Scroll

“Then all the officials sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, ‘Take in your hand the scroll from which you have read to the people and come.’ So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and went to them. They said to him, ‘Sit down, please, and read it to us.’ So Baruch read it to them.”

b. (:16) Reporting of the Message

“When they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one to another and said to Baruch, ‘We will surely report all these words to the king.’”

c. (:17-18) Identifying the Source of the Message

“And they asked Baruch, saying, ‘Tell us, please, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?’ Then Baruch said to them, ‘He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the book.’”

Constable: They asked Baruch how he wrote the scroll, and Baruch replied that he had written it as Jeremiah dictated the prophecies to him. They evidently wanted to make sure that Jeremiah was the source of the prophecies, and not Baruch.

Longman: Lundbom reports that “lack ink for writing was made from carbon, usually being soot scraped from cooking vessels or else specially prepared, and then mixed with a solution of gum and water and dried into cakes” and that “pens were made from a piece of thin rush (*Phragmites communis*), but from one end on the bias and then frayed to form a brush” (p. 602).

d. (:19) Protecting Jeremiah and Baruch

“Then the officials said to Baruch, ‘Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and do not let anyone know where you are.’”

II. (:20-26) SCROLL OF CALAMITY BURNED – ACCOUNTABILITY CAN STIR REACTIONS OF DENIAL AND OPPOSITION (READING #3)

A. (:20-21) The King Retrieves the Scroll

1. (:20) Informal Reporting

“So they went to the king in the court, but they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and they reported all the words to the king.”

They had sought to protect the scroll from any angry reaction on the part of the king

2. (:21) Formal Reporting

“Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it to the king as well as to all the officials who stood beside the king.”

**B. (:22-23) The King Reacts With Defiance Against God’s Word =
Burning the Scroll as it is Read**

“Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning in the brazier before him. When Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut it with a scribe’s knife and threw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier.”

Parunak: Why is he so angry personally against what he hears, to the point of refusing to listen to all of it, and of destroying the scroll so violently? In his heart, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, has struck home. He knows he is guilty and that judgment is coming, and the only alternative to repentance is rejection.

Kidner: Jehoiakim’s slow, methodical destruction of the scroll made his rejection of its message a much more emphatic gesture than if he had burned the whole thing at once in a fit of rage.

Mackay: Jehoiakim’s treatment of the scroll was influenced by semi-magical ideas of its inherent power. By ostentatiously destroying it he sought to counter the power of God’s word, just as Hananiah would later do by breaking Jeremiah’s yoke (**28:10-11**). But his gesture of brazen defiance was ineffective in the face of the power of God.

C. (:24-25) The King Refuses the Counsel of His Officials

1. (:24) No Fear of God or Remorse

“Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments.”

2. (:25) No Listening to Counsel

“Even though Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.”

**D. (:26) The King Reacts With Malice Against God’s Messengers =
Seeking to Capture Baruch and Jeremiah**

“And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king’s son, Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but the LORD hid them.”

Constable: This king’s response to hearing the Lord’s Word stands in stark contrast to that of his father Josiah, who tore his clothes in remorse when he heard the law scroll read to him (**2 Kings 22:11-20**). Josiah had feared and called the people to repentance, but Jehoiakim feared nothing and called for the prophet’s arrest.

III. (:27-32) SCROLL OF CALAMITY REWRITTEN – ATTEMPTS AT RESISTING ACCOUNTABILITY ARE FUTILE

(:27) Introduction

“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written at the dictation of Jeremiah, saying,”

A. (:28) Command to Rewrite the Scroll

“Take again another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned.”

B. (:29-31) Condemnation of Jehoiakim King of Judah

1. (:29) For Scoffing at God’s Word

“And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, ‘Thus says the LORD, You have burned this scroll, saying, Why have you written on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will make man and beast to cease from it?’”

2. (:30-31) For Rebellion and Rejecting God’s Word

“Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, ‘He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. I will also punish him and his descendants and his servants for their iniquity, and I will bring on them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the calamity that I have declared to them—but they did not listen.’”

D. (:32) Compilation of a Second Scroll

“Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.”

Guzik: In fact, the opposition of Jehoiakim made his cause worse, not better. Responding to the king’s cutting and burning of His word, God was determined to bring more words of judgment, not fewer.

Mackay: Though Jehoiakim wanted his own way, that was not to be. The rewritten scroll served as a sign that the word of the Lord cannot be set aside by human endeavor, however forceful and radical. The burned scroll testified that the king and the people he led had no time for the word of the Lord, but they would not on that account escape its dire predictions. The word of the Lord would not pass away, and their obstinacy would bring on them the predicted calamity.

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What can we learn here about the process of the inspiration of scripture?
- 2) How can we improve our listening skills with respect to responding to the Word of God?
- 3) Why was the second scroll longer than the first scroll?
- 4) How has the Bible been attacked down through church history and what steps has God taken to protect and preserve His Word?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peter Wallace: Reading, Writing and Repentance

There's no fit of rage. There's no tantrum thrown by an out-of-control king. Jehoiakim coolly cuts the scroll with his knife – throwing piece by piece into the fire. Maybe you are not as blatant as Jehoiakim – but that is what you do when you read your Bible, but you do not do what it says!

We have come to the brink of disaster. All of the warnings of Jeremiah have brought us to the edge. All of the surrounding material focuses on the destruction of Jerusalem. **Chapters 32-34** come from the tenth year of Zedekiah, during the siege of Jerusalem (587 BC). **Chapter 35** then jumps back to the earlier siege of Jerusalem during the days of Jehoiakim (around 598 BC), but as we saw last week, it is intentionally contrasted with the story of **ch 34**. Then if you look forward, **chapters 37-45** will tell the story of the fall of Jerusalem in 587, and the aftermath for those who stayed in Jerusalem.

But **chapter 36** suddenly jumps back to the years 605-604 – back to the middle of Jeremiah's ministry. Why is this here? Because the action of Jehoiakim in burning the word of the LORD will be answered with the burning of the city of Jerusalem (**37:10**). Jehoiakim's brother, Zedekiah, will not listen to Jeremiah either. If you reject the word of the LORD you will die.

But there is a second reason why **chapter 36** is located here. Chapter 36 introduces the figure of Baruch. Baruch will play a key (though quiet) role in **chapters 37-45**. Baruch is the scribe who writes down the words of Jeremiah. As such, Baruch is a key figure for the development of the biblical text – the move from the prophet as preacher to the prophetic text. What happens to the word of God when the prophet is not in the room? The text of the prophet Jeremiah is every bit as much the authentic word of God as the oral preaching of Jeremiah.

As **Walter Brueggeman** puts it: “It is the book (scroll), and not the presence of the

prophet, which becomes decisive in resisting the king. From now on, establishment leadership must face a book which relentlessly places established power in jeopardy. The scroll is so much more difficult to resist because it cannot, like a person, be intimidated, banished, or destroyed. It keeps reappearing.” (346) The text of scripture keeps reasserting itself over/against the powers of this age. The word as written has an authority that resists the politics of this age.

1. Writing: The Words of the LORD and the Words of Jeremiah (v1-10)

a. Maybe They Will Repent? (v1-3)

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim. This is the year 605 B.C. – an important year in many ways! The fourth year of Jehoiakim was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (**25:1**) This was the year of the Battle of Carchemish, where Nebuchadnezzar defeated the armies of Assyria and Egypt and established control of the Levant. Josiah had died four years earlier, in the year 609, fighting against Egypt. In his last years, Josiah had witnessed the rise of the Babylonians, and the crumbling of the Assyrian empire. Egypt feared the rising Babylonian power, and so Pharaoh Neco allied with the Assyrians. But Josiah, seeking to ingratiate himself with the Babylonians, ambushed the Egyptians in 609 – and died in battle. Pharaoh Neco responded by taking Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz, captive to Egypt, where he died, and replacing him with another son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, with a very clear message: you are now pro-Egyptian!

Earlier in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, another word had come from the LORD to Jeremiah. In **chapter 25**, we hear that in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah proclaimed that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and would serve the king of Babylon for 70 years (**25:11**). And then, after 70 years, God will punish Babylon and restore Jerusalem. Apparently that word had caused such controversy that Jeremiah had been banned from going to the temple (**v5**), so the LORD commands Jeremiah to write down all his prophecies:

Most OT prophets were simply preachers. There were “schools of the prophets” – where young men would be trained in the art of prophesying. (Since there were not very many books, most of their training would have come as apprentices to other prophets). We only have written prophecies from 16 prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Twelve (sometimes called the Minor Prophets). But there were dozens or hundreds of other prophets who did not write scripture. We rarely get to see how the OT was written, but **verses 2-8** give us a glimpse into the process. Jeremiah has been prophesying for 23 years (cf. **25:3**), but apparently he has not been writing it down. He has been preaching – but not writing. But now, after 23 years of his preaching ministry, God commands him to write down the oracles that he had received earlier.

This helps us understand some of the differences between the first half of Jeremiah and the later oracles. In the first 19 chapters there are a lot of general oracles – “*the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah...*” but after the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605 BC), we get more specific times and locations. You can see how the first 19 chapters are Jeremiah’s later remembrances – “*The LORD said to me in the days of King Josiah...*” (**3:6**). That’s a very general reference! We should recognize from this that the written version

might not be identical to the precise words spoken 20 years earlier. For instance, think about the variations in the gospel accounts: the same episode is told in slightly different words by the different gospel writers.

The doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration means three things:

- 1) it is **verbal** – namely, that the words that were written down are inspired;
- 2) it is **plenary** – which means “all” the words that were written are inspired;
- 3) and it is **inspired** – which means that it is God who breathed out these words through the mouth of Jeremiah and the pen of Baruch.

This is important because what is inspired is not the original preaching of Jeremiah, but the text of Jeremiah. And the text of Jeremiah is not just the word of the prophet, it is, as God says, “*all the words that I have spoken to you.*” These words are nothing less than “*the words of the LORD.*” There were lots of prophets who were sent by God to preach – but their words were not necessarily inspired by God. (Most of the prophets were no more inspired than I am! How do I know that? Because their words never got written down and put in scripture!)

But in response to God’s command, Jeremiah calls the scribe, Baruch:

b. Baruch Writes the Scroll of Jeremiah (v4-8)

Baruch will be associated with the ministry of Jeremiah for the next 19 years. From 605 – 586 BC, Baruch was the scribe who wrote out the prophecies of Jeremiah. His brother, Seraiah, will take a copy of Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon (**ch 51**). But here in **chapter 36**, since Jeremiah was banned from going to the house of the LORD, he commanded Baruch to go to the temple on a fast day and read the whole scroll of Jeremiah’s prophecies.

Remember that the LORD had told Jeremiah that he would protect him from his enemies! God had promised that Jeremiah would not be killed by his foes. But that does not make Jeremiah reckless! Jeremiah still honors the command of those in authority over him. He had been banned – he was forbidden to go the temple. And so he accepts this (unjust) decision and sends Baruch in his place.

But notice the timing of when Jeremiah wants this read. At a fast day. Fast days are held when there is reason for corporate concern. And as Judah’s enemies are playing ping-pong with the sons of Josiah, it is clear that Jerusalem’s independence is severely threatened. The house of David and the temple of the LORD – the son of God and the place where God’s name dwells on earth – are in danger. And so all the people of God come together for a fast day at the temple. And Jeremiah times it this way out of hope: It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the LORD, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people.

Remember that Jonah had announced: “*Forty days and Nineveh will be destroyed!*” Yes, earlier that year Jeremiah had announced that Jerusalem will be destroyed – and

will serve Babylon for 70 years. But Nineveh repented! If God heard the repentance of a foreign nation like Nineveh, how much more would he hear the repentance of his own city, Jerusalem! It may seem like it's too late – but God is slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love.

So first we have seen the writing of the Word of the LORD in the words of Jeremiah. And we have seen that the purpose of this writing is to call Jerusalem to repentance. What will happen when the word of God is read? Think of the catechism question: how is the word of God to be read and heard that it may become effectual to salvation? That the word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer, receive it with faith and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives.

And so we come to point two: when the word is read, how will you respond to the word? Jeremiah's prophecies were written down so that you might hear them! How will you respond?

2. Reading: How Will You Respond to the Word? (v9-26)

There are three readings of the Jeremiah scroll.

- First, by Baruch in the temple, in the chamber of Shaphan.
- Second, by Baruch to the officials.
- And third, by Jehudi – one of the officials – to the king, Jehoiakim.

And the three responses are important:

a. The First Reading: Baruch and the House of Shaphan (v9-10)

This is the year 604 – the fifth year after the death of Josiah. Jeremiah was banned from the temple after the speech of **chapter 25**. Now the message has been written down. Judah has been ruled for the last four years by a pro-Egyptian king. But now the army of Egypt has been defeated by the Babylonians at Carchemish. By the 9th month of the 5th year of Jehoiakim, in the fall of 604 BC, it is abundantly clear that Babylon has won – and that the Assyrian-Egyptian coalition has no hope of stopping them. The scroll of Jeremiah's prophecies (something like the first 20 chapters of Jeremiah) would include a reminder of the history of the failure of Israel, the failure of Judah, the failure of Jerusalem – and how God was now handing Jerusalem over to Babylon. And since we know that Jeremiah was banned from the temple in 605 B.C., the same year that he prophesied the 70 years of exile, we can safely assume that the prophesy of the 70 years of exile would have been included in the Jeremiah scroll read in 604 B.C.

We are told in verse 9 that “*all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast...*” Where was the King? Why was he not in the temple for the fast day? What was so important to him that he could not be there, leading the people in their repentance and fasting? Well, it was the ninth month. It's December. And it's cold. So the king is in his “winter chamber” – with a fire in the fire pot to keep him warm. While the people are fasting in the temple, the king is staying comfortable in his warm inner chamber.

So when Baruch is walking up toward the temple on that cold winter day, carrying in his hand the scroll of Jeremiah, where does he go? It says that he read the scroll “*in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD’s house.*” This is important! We are told the precise place where Baruch goes to read. The temple had many chambers around the outside of the court. These chambers were used for the people of God to partake of the covenant meal during the feasts. Some of these chambers could become associated with particular families. So if you were connected with the house of Shaphan, you would always eat in “their” chamber. (Think of how people today always sit in the same pew...) And given the importance of the house of Shaphan to our story, we need to take a moment to remember who Shaphan was – and why Gemariah, his son, is so important. [We actually have a seal from the 7th century with the stamp of Gemariah, son of Shaphan] We often think of the prophets as solitary figures. Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel – They often appear as lonely voices – as though no one listened. But there are moments when the scriptures reveal that in fact there was a community of the faithful – of those who heard the word of the Lord – of those who encouraged the prophets to continue in their faithful proclamation. We saw this back in **chapter 26**, when certain elders of the land defended Jeremiah “*in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim.*” (In other words, around the year 609).

The house of Shaphan deserves to be remembered for being such a faithful family. Who was Shaphan? In the year 622, Hilkiyah the priest discovered the book of the law in the temple. Shaphan was the king’s secretary who read the book of the law. His son, Ahikam, was also present that day, along with Achbor the son of Micaiah. (**2 Kings 22:12**) Thirteen years later, in 609, after the death of the good king Josiah, Pharaoh Neco replaced the pro-Babylonian Jehoahaz with Jehoiakim, his younger brother, with the clear message that Jehoiakim needed to be pro-Egyptian. And when the prophet Uriah spoke against Jehoiakim, Elnathan the son of Achbor was the agent of Jehoiakim who pursued him as far as Egypt to bring him back for the king to execute him (**26:22**)

Why did the prophet Jeremiah not share the fate of Uriah? “*But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death.*” (**26:24**) A decade later, after 597 – Jeremiah sends a letter to the exiles in Babylon – “*sent by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan and Gemariah the son of Hilkiyah whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.*” And in 587 Gedaliah the son of Ahikam ben Shaphan will be appointed governor by the Babylonians. And Jeremiah will be given into his charge. So, Shaphan had at least three sons: Gemariah, Ahikam, and Elasah – all of whom appear to have been faithful to the LORD in supporting Jeremiah. Ahikam’s son, Gedaliah was faithful as well – and is rewarded by the Babylonians with the governorship of Judah.

There is one other son of Shaphan named in scripture: Jaazaniah – in **Ezekiel 8:11**. Ezekiel was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah. He was in the family of the priests. He had been carried away captive with Jeconiah in 597 B.C. In other words, Ezekiel would have been a young man growing up in Jerusalem during the ministry of Jeremiah. As a faithful young man training to be a priest of Yahweh, Ezekiel would

probably have been in the temple that day when Baruch arrived at the chamber of Gemariah son of Shaphan. But in **Ezekiel 8**, the LORD shows Ezekiel a vision of the temple in Jerusalem – and there in a secret chamber in the temple, there are 70 elders of Israel – each worshipping idols – led by Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. *“Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of pictures?”* (8:12)

And in response to the idolatry of the elders of Israel – led by the son of Shaphan – the glory of the LORD departs from the temple. That vision was dated in 592 B.C. Five years later – since the glory of the LORD had departed from the temple – driven out by the apostasy of his people – the temple would be destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. No foreign ruler could destroy Jerusalem. Sennacherib, king of Assyria, had tried – and failed. So long as the LORD of Hosts protected Jerusalem, no enemy could defeat his people. But when his own people turned away – when even the faithful remnant (the house of Shaphan) fell away – then destruction swiftly came. But Ezekiel only saw this because the LORD showed him in a vision! Jeremiah never sees it. Throughout the book of Jeremiah, the house of Shaphan leads the faithful remnant. Of course, from Jehoiakim’s perspective, the House of Shaphan is the leader of the pro-Babylonian party. And therefore, the House of Shaphan is a dangerous party. They are too powerful to be eliminated – but they are also not in the inner circle. And you see this dynamic in the second reading in **verses 11-19**:

b. The Second Reading: Baruch and the Fear of the Officials (v11-19)

Micaiah – the grandson of Shaphan – was representing the family at the temple that day. When he hears the words of the LORD, he recognizes that this is important. Yes, Jeremiah has been preaching this message for 23 years – but now it has been read publicly by Baruch in the temple on a fast day. The effect of the message is that the king’s pro-Egypt policy has been publicly challenged by a prophet. This may be the opportunity that the faithful have been waiting for! So he goes to his father, Gemariah, who was in the king’s house, in the secretary’s chamber. Elishama the secretary is there, and several other officials, along with Elnathan the son of Achbor (the fellow who had pursued Uriah and brought him back from Egypt!). He tells them what he has heard from Baruch – and so they quickly send Jehudi to bring Baruch to them. Baruch comes and they ask him to read the scroll to them. *“When they heard all the words, they turned one to another in fear...”*

Why fear? Because this is the house of Shaphan. And the house of Shaphan is still faithful to the LORD. They want the king to hear these words. They have been trying to persuade the king to yield to Babylon. But it is a dangerous thing to confront the king! The text of Jeremiah provides them with a safe alternative. After they ascertain that Baruch has simply written down the words of Jeremiah, they urge him to hide – and to tell Jeremiah to hide. (And don’t tell us where you are hiding!!) They are pretty sure how the king will respond to this! But while they are faithful to the LORD, they are also servants of Jehoiakim. They must honor the king – and so it is best for them not to know where Jeremiah is! Further, some may well have shared Jeremiah’s hope: maybe this is what God will use to bring Jehoiakim to repentance?!

c. The Third Reading: The King Burns the Word of the LORD (v20-26)

Neither Jeremiah nor Baruch is present for the third reading. There is no prophet in the room. There is only the text of the words of the LORD. A generation earlier the book of the Law of Moses had been found in the temple. Hilkiah the priest had found it. Shaphan himself had read it to King Josiah. And now Josiah's son will be confronted by another text. The words of the LORD in the text of Jeremiah.

We are reminded that it was the ninth month (December) – and so it is cold – and there is a fire burning in the fire pot before the king. And so as Jehudi reads the scroll, the king cuts off the portion that Jehudi has read, and throws it into the fire. Imagine poor Jehudi! He appears to have been one of the faithful. He had heard Baruch read the scroll earlier. Now he is given the honor of reading the word of the LORD to the King. But after he has read 3-4 columns, the king reaches over with his knife, slashes off the end of the scroll, and throws it in the flames! This is not the burning rage of a hot-tempered king. If Jehoiakim had lost his temper, he would have thrown the whole scroll into the fire without listening! This is the cool and calculating act of a king who will sit and listen to the whole scroll, and then communicate to his advisors exactly what he thinks of each line!

Elnathan had once done the king's bidding in bringing Uriah back from Egypt. But now you find Elnathan with Delaiah and Gemariah urging the king not to burn the scroll: Don't you see, O King, you are storing up wrath against yourself?! If this is the word of the LORD, then you are dooming yourself and your offspring! As Christopher Wright puts it, "He insisted on listening to every word and then publicly repudiated every word he heard. Jehoiakim's rejection of the word of God was not a hasty mistake. It was the most deliberate act of defiance of the spoken and written word of God recorded in the Bible." (Wright, 375)

In the days of Jehoiakim's father – the day that Shaphan had read the book of the Law – with Hilkiah and Achbor present. On that day, Josiah tore his clothes in fear and repentance. Verse 24 shows the contrast: *Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their garments.* Over the protests of the son of Shaphan and the son of Achbor – the son of Josiah repudiates the word of the LORD. Jehoiakim knows that Elnathan son of Achbor will no longer do his bidding – and he knows that the house of Shaphan is against him – so instead he sends his own son (Jerahmeel, who was probably not much more than ten years old) together with two of his servants in order to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. "But the LORD hid them." They had taken the good counsel of Gemariah and his friends and the LORD protected them.

3. Repentance (Or the Lack Thereof): The Indestructibility of God's Word (v27-32)

Jehoiakim had burned the word of the LORD, and had sent his young son to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. Now the LORD says that his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. He and his offspring and his servants will be

punished for their iniquity. But you cannot overthrow the written word of God. You cannot burn it out!

Verse 32 tells us that the second scroll was much longer than the first. The reason is quite simple: the purpose of the first scroll was to bring repentance to Jerusalem. If the king repents – if the people repent – then the book of Jeremiah could have been as short as the book of Jonah! But Jehoiakim did not repent. Jerusalem did not repent. Therefore, all of this needed to be written down for us.

God warns all nations everywhere. His word comes to individuals and to communities. How we live together as the people of God matters. And God will not be mocked. What will you do with the Word of the LORD? Maybe you are less brash than Jehoiakim. Maybe you are not cutting pages out of your Bible and burning them! But if you do not repent – if you do not put into practice the word of the LORD – then you are practically imitating Jehoiakim! The reason why Baruch wrote out another scroll – with more words – was because we need to hear this! Jesus is the Son of David who has heard the Word of the LORD and done it. After all, Jesus himself is the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. Therefore, those who are united to him by faith – those who have been united to him by baptism into his death – are called to walk in newness of life. The resurrection life of Jesus now resides in you. And therefore, you are called to respond to the words of Jeremiah – the Word of the LORD – with faith, hope, and love.

Wiersbe: It's interesting to see how different people responded to the Word of God. There were three public readings of the book, and the first one was to the people in the temple (**36:10**). There's no record that the crowd responded in any special way. One man, Micaiah, however, became concerned because of what he had heard (**v. 11**). He was the grandson of Shaphan, the man who read the newly found book of the Law to King Josiah (**2 Kings 22**), so it's no wonder he had an interest in God's Word.

Micaiah told the princes about the book, and they asked to hear it, so Baruch read it to them (**36:12-19**). Along with Micaiah, the officials trembled when they heard the Word (**v. 16**), for they knew that the nation was in great danger. They hid the scroll, told Baruch and Jeremiah to hide, and then went to report to the king that he needed to hear what Jeremiah had written.

The third reading of the scroll was before the king (**vv. 21-26**) and was done by Jehudi, who may have been one of the scribes. The king treated God's Word like fuel for the fire! In spite of the remonstrances of three of his officials, the king continued cutting and burning the scroll until it was completely destroyed. The royal attendants who also heard the reading of the scroll showed no fear and thereby encouraged Jehoiakim in his evil deed.

Kidner: This first recorded attempt to obliterate the word of God is something of a foretaste of the attacks on it in days to come: by sceptics, by persecutors, and, with whatever good intent, by the rash use of the scholar's knife. On this occasion, as on others to come, God saw to its preservation and completion (**32**); and it is interesting to

reflect that behind the king's bravado (and behind that of some later assailants) there may have lurked an unacknowledged fear. Was it only to express contempt that he reduced the scroll to ashes? Or was it, rather, the kind of precaution that a superstitious man cannot quite bring himself to renounce, whatever his disclaimers? Did he reckon that these words were dangerous as long as they remained in writing?

TEXT: Jeremiah 37:1-21

TITLE: PATRIOT ACCUSED OF TREASON

BIG IDEA:
THE PUPPET KING CANNOT CONTROL THE FAITHFUL PROPHET OF GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Nobody loved the nation of Israel more deeply than Jeremiah. Nobody grieved over their sinful state more deeply than he. He was a true patriot but was falsely accused and imprisoned as a traitor. Jeremiah was a man of conviction who stood by God's revelation to him despite whatever pressure was exerted by people in high places to try to get him to compromise.

Rick Ezell: Throughout Jeremiah's ordeal, he stood by his convictions, speaking the truth of God's will. He was "*an iron pillar, and bronze walls*" (**Jer. 1:18**). He was a man of unfaltering conviction. . .A person with convictions knows what he believes, where he is going, and why. Convictions are not forced on an individual. They are beliefs and actions of choice. They are the truth, the mission, and the calling given by God that is not altered by time, people, opinions, or circumstances.

Francis Kelley wrote, "Convictions are the mainsprings of action, the driving powers of life. What a man lives are his convictions." **Martin Luther King, Jr.** often told his children, "If a man has nothing that is worth dying for, he is not fit to live."

Each day will challenge our convictions. The person who perseveres in obedience lives by those convictions each day.

THE PUPPET KING CANNOT CONTROL THE FAITHFUL PROPHET OF GOD

I. (:1-10) THE CONDEMNED SEEK TO MANIPULATE GOD'S FAVOR

A. (:1-5) Manipulative Tactics by the Puppet King

1. (:1-2) Weakness of the Puppet King

a. (:1) Weak Politically – Propped up by Nebuchadnezzar

“Now Zedekiah the son of Josiah whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made king in the land of Judah, reigned as king in place of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim.”

Maclaren: Zedekiah was a small man on a great stage, a weakling set to face circumstances that would have taxed the strongest.

b. (:2) Weak Spiritually – Rejecting God's Word

“But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land

listened to the words of the LORD which He spoke through Jeremiah the prophet.”

Transition – making the connection from **Jehoiakim** in **chap. 36** (who was so opposed to Jeremiah while his officials were somewhat supportive) to **Zedekiah** (who showed some kindness to the prophet while his officials were intent on imprisoning him).

Feinberg: This verse shows the fulfillment of the judgment Jeremiah pronounced against the godless Jehoiakim in **36:30**. Instead of Jehoiakim’s son Coniah (Jehoiachin), Nebuchadnezzar put on the throne Zedekiah, who was not descended from Jehoiakim but was his brother and thus the uncle of Coniah. . . Eighteen years pass between chapters 36 and 37. Now the narrative centers on the last two years of the reign of Zedekiah, who was appointed king by Nebuchadnezzar after solemnly pledging his loyalty in the name of the Lord. Because of Egyptian influence at court, which he could not resist, Zedekiah decided to break his pledge. This was the immediate cause of the final siege of Jerusalem.

2. (:3) Weaseling Request Made to Jeremiah by the Puppet King

“Yet King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, ‘Please pray to the LORD our God on our behalf.’”

Seems like Zedekiah had more respect for the intercessory efficacy of Jeremiah than of his own religious officials.

Mackay: Zedekiah and his courtiers were looking for divine endorsement of their policy. They expect a prophet to engage in efficacious intercession for divine blessing to accrue to them on their own terms. It does not reveal a willingness to listen to the word of the Lord to them and to act in obedience to it. They have the political and military insight to recognize that the circumstances of the city are desperate, but still they lack the spiritual perception to see how inadequate and demeaning their attitude is towards the Lord.

Constable: Zephaniah the priest was a member of the delegation that Zedekiah had sent to Jeremiah at the beginning of the siege (**Jeremiah 21:1-10**). He was also the recipient of a letter from the false prophet Shemaiah, who was already in Babylonian exile, demanding Jeremiah’s imprisonment (**Jeremiah 29:24-32**). Jehucal (also called Jucal) appears later as Jeremiah’s enemy (**Jeremiah 38:1**).

3. (:4-5) Wavering Circumstances

a. (:4) Situation for Jeremiah was About to Change

“Now Jeremiah was still coming in and going out among the people, for they had not yet put him in the prison.”

b. (:5) Siege of Jerusalem Temporarily Interrupted

“Meanwhile, Pharaoh’s army had set out from Egypt; and when

the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted the siege from Jerusalem.”

Parunak: The point of the request: Jer, now that you see that Neb has withdrawn, wouldn't you like to agree with the official temple prophets that God really is going to spare the city?

B. (:6-10) Bold Prophecy of God's Faithful Prophet

(:6) *“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying,”*

Everything Jeremiah does is governed by the Word of God.

1. (:7) Don't Look to Egypt for Deliverance

“Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Thus you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come out for your assistance is going to return to its own land of Egypt.’”

2. (:8) The Prophecy of Destruction of Jerusalem Still Stands

“The Chaldeans will also return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire.”

Nothing has changed with respect to Jeremiah's prophecy – despite the changing circumstances

Feinberg: Jeremiah did not waver in his fidelity to the truth. The relief of Jerusalem was, he said, only temporary and would ultimately change nothing (**vv. 6-8**). It was only a passing incident. The Egyptian army may have been defeated (cf. **Ezek 30:21**); so **Peake**). Circumstances and appearances to the contrary, God's ultimate word about Jerusalem was that it would be taken and burned. There was no basis for a false hope. Then the prophet stated (**v.9**) in the strongest terms, which some have called hyperbolic, God's unchanging purpose to destroy Jerusalem. This was unquestionably the will of the Lord. Escape was out of the question. Even the “wounded” would be able to carry out the doom threatening God's people (**v.10**).

3. (:9-10) The Chaldeans Cannot be Defeated

a. (:9) The Chaldeans Will Return

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Do not deceive yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans will surely go away from us, for they will not go.’”

b. (:10) The City Will Be Burned

“For even if you had defeated the entire army of Chaldeans who were fighting against you, and there were only wounded men left among them, each man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.”

Longman: But instead of prayer, Jeremiah responds with yet another oracle of judgment directed toward Zedekiah. After all, God had earlier forbidden Jeremiah to pray for the people as a way to express the depth of their sin and the certainty of their destruction (7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

Parunak: Don't conclude that you're off the hook. The Bible uses two vivid pictures to show the strength of Babylon and the weakness of Egypt.

1) Babylon will destroy you even under the worst of circumstances. Even if every man of the Babylonian army were wounded and lying in his tent, they would still rise up like zombies and destroy the city.

2) It is useless to trust in the aid of Egypt. Ezek makes this point to the captives already in Babylon, at this same time, in **Ezek. 29:6**, when he says that the Egyptians *"have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel. When they took hold of thee by thy hand, thou didst break, and rend all their shoulder; and when they leaned upon thee, thou brakest, and madest all their loins to be at a stand."* Relying on Egypt for protection against Babylon is like trying to use a cattail as a walking stick on a rough hike. It just won't hold up.

II. (:11-16) THE CAPTURED PROPHET OF GOD ACCUSED OF TREASON

A. (:11-12) Innocent Business Trip Undertaken by Jeremiah

1. (:11) Opportunity: Gates of Jerusalem Opened Up

"Now it happened when the army of the Chaldeans had lifted the siege from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,"

2. (:12) Operation: Real Estate Transaction Pursued

"that Jeremiah went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin in order to take possession of some property there among the people."

B. (:13-14) Illegitimate Arrest as a Traitor

"While he was at the Gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah the son of Hananiah was there; and he arrested Jeremiah the prophet, saying, 'You are going over to the Chaldeans!.' But Jeremiah said, 'A lie! I am not going over to the Chaldeans'; yet he would not listen to him. So Irijah arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials."

Ryken: Jeremiah had good reason to leave the city: He needed to take care of some personal business. Most likely, he was going to discuss his family estate, including the field his cousin Hanamel was trying to sell him (the actual purchase was not made until after Jeremiah was in prison). But he ran into trouble at Checkpoint Benjamin. The head of security misinterpreted Jeremiah's intentions. Irijah recognized him, accused him of desertion, and arrested him for treason.

Guzik: Because he said that it was futile for the people of Judah to resist the Babylonians, Jeremiah was suspected of being a sympathizer with the Babylonians and maybe even their spy.

C. (:15-16) Imprisonment by Angry Officials

“Then the officials were angry at Jeremiah and beat him, and they put him in jail in the house of Jonathan the scribe, which they had made into the prison. For Jeremiah had come into the dungeon, that is, the vaulted cell; and Jeremiah stayed there many days.”

Parunak: Why are the princes so opposed to him and his message? To the common people it makes little difference whether they are peasants under a Babylonian puppet or under Neb himself. But a noble is only a noble in his own society. His only hope of retaining his prestige and prosperity is in outlasting Neb. If the defenders all defect, as Jer has been preaching, the city will fall, and they will lose their position. Thus it is the deceitfulness of their own riches that blinds them to God’s warnings, their only real hope of surviving at all.

Mackay: This pit, however, seems to have been used for storage of commodities such as grain, in that there were cells/cellars there. It was in such an underground prison that Jeremiah was confined in airless, gloomy, and probably damp conditions. It certainly seems to have constituted on its own a threat to his health (v. 20). Jeremiah in prison in in some senses a paradigm for what had happened to the word of the Lord as well as to the messenger who brought that word. The word was having no freedom to impact on the life of the nation; it too was in confinement. The leaders of the nation closed the prophet’s mouth and ministry by imprisoning him in part of the domain of the ruling arty in Jerusalem.

III. (:17-21) THE CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE PUPPET KING AND THE FAITHFUL PROPHET OF GOD

A. (:17) Jeremiah Prophecies Consistently

1. (:17a) Intimidation – Trying to get Jeremiah to change his prophecy
“Now King Zedekiah sent and took him out; and in his palace the king secretly asked him and said, ‘Is there a word from the LORD?’”

2. (:17b) Boldness – Standing Strong against the manipulative tactics
“And Jeremiah said, ‘There is!’ Then he said, ‘You will be given into the hand of the king of Babylon!’”

Constable: The king was really the one bound in this situation, and the prisoner was the truly free man.

B. (:18-19) Jeremiah Pleads His Innocence

1. (:18) Committed No Sin

“Moreover Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, ‘In what way have I sinned against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?’”

Ryken: Jeremiah said two things to try to gain his freedom. He tried to prove his innocence and his truthfulness.

2. (:19) Contrasted with False Prophets Whom Jeremiah Exposes

“Where then are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you or against this land’?”

Wiersbe: Jeremiah took the opportunity to expose the deceptive, optimistic messages of the false prophets. If they had been speaking the truth, the king should have asked them for a message from the Lord! Meanwhile, Jeremiah asked to be delivered from prison, a request that Zedekiah granted. The prophet was placed in the court of the prison and granted a daily ration of bread as long as the supply lasted. While we appreciate Zedekiah’s concern to save Jeremiah, we wonder why the king didn’t have a concert to save his people. He was afraid to change his policies because he was afraid of his advisers and officers.

C. (:20-21) Jeremiah Petitions the King for Improved Care

1. (:20) Improved Conditions of Confinement

“But now, please listen, O my lord the king; please let my petition come before you and do not make me return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, that I may not die there.”

2. (:21) Improved Nourishment

“Then King Zedekiah gave commandment, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guardhouse and gave him a loaf of bread daily from the bakers’ street, until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guardhouse.”

CONCLUSION:

Constable: quoting **Keown** -- In many ways, Zedekiah is a tragic figure. It seems that he is attracted to Jeremiah and his message like iron filings to a magnet, yet he is never able to summon enough resolve to act in response to that message. While such conclusions are speculative, it is possible that Zedekiah presents a paradigm of persons whose rejection of the purposes of God through their weakness of character is every bit as damaging and damning as the aggressive rebellion of Jehoiakim.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How difficult must it have been for Jeremiah to be bold to preach such an unpopular message to the king when he was in such personal danger?
- 2) Who is really in control in this historical situation? You see the political posturing between a weak king Zedekiah and his powerful officials. But behind the scenes how is the Lord demonstrating His sovereignty?
- 3) When have we experienced unfair accusations and unfair treatment? How did we respond and what lessons did we learn?
- 4) Why is self-deception so prevalent and why are people so quick to sugarcoat the truth rather than face up to how God describes the reality of their situation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: (37:11 – 38:28) gives the story in four acts, each concluding with Jer in jail: 37:16, 21; 38:13, 28. In the first and third acts, we see the animosity of the princes. In the second and fourth, Jer speaks directly with the king. The tension between the princes, who hate him, and the king, who has a fearful respect of him, emerges in his different places of incarceration.

- 1) 37:16, the princes land him in a cistern-house, perhaps a small shed over the mouth of the cistern to keep things from falling in it.
- 2) 37:21, the king liberates him to the court of the prison, which is in the king's own house (32:2), a much more comfortable situation.
- 3) 38:13, the princes get him uncomfortable again. Not just the cistern shed, but now in the cistern itself.
- 4) 38:28, the king once again returns him to the court of the prison.

Mackay: After the surrender of the city in 597 BC, Nebuchadnezzar had appointed the twenty-one year old Zedekiah as king, but many of the people, both at home and among the exiles in Babylon, still regarded Jehoiachin as their legitimate ruler, and were waiting for his early restoration (28:4). Zedekiah had been placed in an unenviable situation where to patriots in Judah his position was compromised: he was simply a Babylonian puppet. The difficulties of his situation were compounded by flaws in his character. He was not strong-minded and decisive, but weak and vacillating. He did not possess the strength of character to deal with the stressful situation in his own court caused by the pro-Egyptian policy favoured by the majority of his advisers.

Thompson: quoting **B. Duhm** – The scene is just as moving as it is historically interesting; on the one hand is the prophet, disfigured by mistreatment, the prison atmosphere and privations, but firm in his predictions, without any invective against his persecutors, without defiance, exaggeration or fanaticism, simple, physically mild and humble; on the other hand is the king who, obviously against his own will, had been led by his officials into the war venture, anxiously watching the lips of the martyr for a favorable word for himself, whispering secretly with the man whom his official imprisoned for treason, weak, a poor creature but not evil, a king but much more bound than the prisoner who stand before him.

Peter Wallace: Surrender or Die

Last time we heard about Baruch, the scribe who wrote down the words that the LORD spoke to Jeremiah. And so now we will hear the story of Jeremiah – a story that we should presume was mediated through the pen of Baruch. Last time, we heard the story of the burning of the scroll of the prophet Jeremiah. That had taken place in the year 604 BC – the year after the battle of Carchemish – at a time when the power of Babylon was on the rise – and the power of Egypt was failing.

Introduction: The Politics of Babylon (37:1-2)

The text of Jeremiah demands that we pay attention to this political background. What had happened to Jehoiakim? Well, Jehoiakim died in the middle of the siege of Jerusalem in 598 BC – and they tried to make his son, Coniah, king in his place, but Nebuchadnezzar took Coniah (also called Jehoiachin) captive, and replaced him with his uncle Zedekiah. This made Zedekiah the third son of Josiah to reign in Jerusalem.

Jehoahaz had reigned for three months after the death of Josiah. Then Pharaoh Neco of Egypt replaced him with Jehoiakim (11 years). Jeremiah had told Jehoiakim that none of his descendants would reign in Jerusalem (**36:30**). But when they tried to make Coniah king in place of his father, Nebuchadnezzar intervened and took Coniah captive – making Zedekiah king (597-586).

But while **verse 1** is important for understanding the context, **verse 2** is the crucial one. No one listened. No one obeyed. Some have noted an apparent tension between **verse 2** and the rest of **chapters 37-38**. Zedekiah spends the whole of **chapters 37-38** inquiring of the LORD! And yet, **verse 2** says that neither Zedekiah nor his servants, nor the people, listened to the words of the LORD. Plainly, as our text shows us, Zedekiah went to great lengths to listen to Jeremiah. Zedekiah heard a great deal of what Jeremiah had to say! At least – he heard – he listened – to the words. But he did not obey.

This is the word “*shema*” – “*Hear, Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one...*” This is the great *shema* of **Deuteronomy 6**. Did Moses mean that so long as Israel believes that God is one, nothing else really matters? No! the *Shema* goes on to say, “*love the LORD your God with all your heart...*” But no one listens – no one hears – no one obeys the voice of the LORD – “*the words of the LORD that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet.*”

Why do I spend so much time on the stories of the Old Testament? Because all of this is written down by Baruch for you. This is written down as a warning to us – on whom the ends of the ages have come – as Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 10**. Zedekiah is the king of Judah. In one sense, as the son of David, he is entirely unlike us. And yet, in another sense, he is exactly like us. The word of the LORD comes to Zedekiah – just like it comes to us.

The three inquiries of Zedekiah form a pattern for us: First, “*please pray for us to the LORD*” – Lord, have mercy on our situation. Second, “*Is there a word from the LORD?*” – what does God say about our situation? And third, what must we do to be saved? – what does God call us to do in our situation? And as we’ll see throughout our text, Zedekiah is an excellent example for us in every way – except one. There is only one problem with Zedekiah. He doesn’t do what Jeremiah says.

We live in a day when Babylon rules once more. And there is a way in which Jeremiah’s message to Zedekiah is crucial for us to understand: “**Surrender or die!**” We are not called to defeat Babylon. King Jesus is the one who has defeated Babylon – and he will rule until all things are brought under his feet. The only way that we can properly seek the ‘*peace of Jerusalem*’ is by seeking the peace of Babylon. Do not confuse Jerusalem with Babylon! The peace of the earthly city is not the same as the peace of the heavenly city! But so long as you live in Babylon – so long as Babylon remains the dominant power of this age – you are not called to overthrow Babylon!

1. Zedekiah’s First Inquiry: “Please Pray for Us” (37:3-10)

The first thing Zedekiah does is send a messenger with one of the priests asking Jeremiah to pray to the LORD. This is good. And we are told that at the same time, the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) who were besieging Jerusalem withdrew – because they heard that the Egyptian army was coming. Perhaps Zedekiah might be tempted to think that his prayers were answered! The LORD was delivering Jerusalem from the Babylonians – just like he had saved Jerusalem from the Assyrians in the days of Hezekiah.

The king who relies on Egypt will find that his hand is pierced by a broken reed. (That was what Isaiah had said to Hezekiah). Egypt will not save you! But at this point, nothing will save you. There is no way to defeat Babylon. Even if you defeated the whole army of the Chaldeans – even the wounded remnant of Babylon would destroy this city! Jerusalem must be destroyed – burned with fire – because of her idolatry and wickedness.

Now, this sort of message does not tend to make a lot of friends at the palace! So when the Babylonians withdraw, and Jeremiah sets out to go to the land of Benjamin, he is immediately detained as a deserter – and a traitor!

2. Zedekiah’s Second Inquiry: “Is There Any Word from the LORD?” (37:11-21)

a. Jeremiah Imprisoned as a Deserter (v11-15)

What is Jeremiah doing? Back in **chapter 32**, Jeremiah had purchased a piece of land

from his relative. Now he wants to go take possession of it. Of course, the LORD had told him already that Babylon was coming back. Jeremiah knows that he will never take possession of the land he purchased. Why is he going to Benjamin? Why not? Jeremiah may be living in the last days of Jerusalem. But he continues to do all the ordinary things that a faithful Israelite would do. And so, having redeemed the land for his cousin, he will go and take possession of it – knowing full well that he will never enjoy possession! But his actions will be interpreted by the officials of Jerusalem in the light of his opposition to the King. And so Irijah the sentry would not listen – “*shema*” – he would not hear – he would not obey. If you are going to speak against the dominant ideology – the dominant power – of your day, then don’t be surprised if your actions are interpreted as hostile – even when they are innocent.

Notice that Zedekiah has nothing to do with this. The officials are acting on their own – and from Zedekiah’s words and actions, it would appear that he has little power to control them. The last son of Josiah – the last son of David before Jerusalem’s fall – has fallen far from his calling to do justice in Israel! And yet Zedekiah still wants to hear from the prophet:

b. Zedekiah’s Secret Inquiry and Provision (v16-21)

The king questioned him secretly in his house Think of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night. Except here it is the King who is acting secretly. Perhaps Zedekiah understands that his officials are wrong. Perhaps Zedekiah wants to believe that Jeremiah is right! You can easily sympathize with Zedekiah. He has watched two brothers and a nephew be dethroned by the powers of his age. For more than 30 years – in other words, for Zedekiah’s whole life – Jeremiah has repeatedly been proven to be true. and said, “*Is there any word from the LORD?*” Jeremiah said, “*There is.*” Then he said, “*You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.*” In other words, “*nothing has changed, O king!*” Jerusalem is still doomed – and you have no future here.

But then Jeremiah appeals to the King: So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. In other words, Jeremiah is not released – he is simply transferred to the court of the guard – a location more directly under the protection of the king. Zedekiah will not obey the voice of the LORD speaking through Jeremiah – but neither will he allow Jeremiah to be killed. Perhaps Zedekiah realizes that Jeremiah is, in a way, on his side. No, Jeremiah is not going to change his tune. Jeremiah is not going to say what Zedekiah wants to hear. But Jeremiah is the only man in the city whom Zedekiah can trust to tell the truth. If you ever find someone whom you can trust to tell the truth – even when it hurts – stick close to that person! Zedekiah even orders that a loaf of bread be given to Jeremiah daily – “*until all the bread of the city was gone*” – an ominous warning of the tribulation that was coming upon Jerusalem. But for Jeremiah it only gets worse. Because the officials hear Jeremiah’s warnings and all they hear is treason against the king!

Constable: The text records five steps in Jeremiah’s prison experiences.

- First, he was arrested in the gate and committed to a dungeon on a false charge of treason (**Jeremiah 37:11-15**).

- Second, he was released from the dungeon but restricted to the courtyard of the prison (**Jeremiah 37:16-21**).
- Third, he was imprisoned in Malchijah's miry dungeon in the prison courtyard (**Jeremiah 38:6**).
- Fourth, he was released from this dungeon but restricted to the prison courtyard again until Jerusalem fell (**Jeremiah 38:17-28**).
- Fifth, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the Babylonian guard, took him in chains to Ramah, where he released Jeremiah (**Jeremiah 40:1-4**).

Rick Ezell: Jeremiah had faithfully proclaimed God's message of coming destruction to Judah for forty years. Now all his warnings and predictions were coming true. Babylon had laid siege to Jerusalem. The fall of the city was imminent. You would think after proclaiming a message that was being fulfilled before their very eyes the people would start to believe Jeremiah. But Jeremiah's message only hardened the hearts of the people. They kept taking shots at him, knocking him down, beating him, leaving him for dead. But Jeremiah kept getting back up. He prevailed despite suffering to be faithful to God's orders. Jeremiah persevered in obedience. . .

Christian history is filled with inspiring stories featuring people of principle - those who are immortalized for refusing to compromise their beliefs. In 1660, England's experiment as a Republic came to an abrupt end with the return to monarchist rule under Charles II. With this change, religious freedom also ended and Anglicanism was once again designated as the official state religion. It became illegal to conduct church services outside of the Church of England. Unlicensed individuals were forbidden from addressing a religious gathering.

Under these new laws, John Bunyan was arrested for preaching without a license. His growing popularity, though, prompted the judge to seek some sort of a compromise. Promising Bunyan immediate release if he only promised not to preach again, the judge's leniency was met with the reply, "If you release me today, I shall preach tomorrow!"

Three times in his life Bunyan was arrested, convicted, and jailed for preaching the gospel without a license. In the end, he spent over twelve years in prison. At any time during those years he could have secured his freedom by simply promising not to preach. But Bunyan knew God's calling on his life, and so he adamantly refused to compromise his convictions.

Those prison years were certainly not wasted. It was during this time that Bunyan wrote the book *Pilgrim's Progress*. Its immediate success and ongoing popularity has made it a Christian classic, the second most read book in English literature next to the Bible.

TEXT: Jeremiah 38:1-28

TITLE: TRUTH TELLING CAN LAND YOU IN THE PIT

BIG IDEA:

FAITHFUL TESTIMONY DOESN'T DEVIATE IN THE FACE OF POWERFUL PRESSURE

INTRODUCTION:

Jeremiah provides us a supreme example of faithful preaching in pressure situations. He had to deal with the political intrigue of officials who favored Egypt over Babylon and who were strong enough to manipulate the actions of their king. He was the lone voice who refused to bring a message of peace and safety that would tickle the ears and gain him favor in the sight of men. When he was cast into the mud pit and left to die a slow death of thirst and starvation, he still refused to compromise God's Word. When he was lifted out of the pit by an unlikely hero and given a second chance to bring a pleasant word to the king, he stuck to his guns. Nothing was going to force him to be disloyal in his prophetic ministry.

FAITHFUL TESTIMONY DOESN'T DEVIATE IN THE FACE OF POWERFUL PRESSURE

I. (:1-13) JEREMIAH'S OFFENSE, IMPRISONMENT AND RESCUE

1) The Word Stirs the Pot

A. (:1-3) Offense of Jeremiah – God's Word of Judgment Stirs Opposition

1. (:1) Jeremiah's Audience of Opposition = Specific Chief Officials

"Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, and Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking to all the people, saying,"

Longman: We may assume that they are all members of a pro-Egyptian political party, one that looked to Egypt for hope against the Babylonian threat. These men are deeply disturbed by Jeremiah's preaching. He sounds like an agent of the Babylonians, telling the people that they will survive only if they surrender.

Constable: Gedaliah may have been the son of the Pashhur who beat Jeremiah and placed him in the stocks (**Jeremiah 20:1-6**). "Jucal" was probably the Jehucal who visited Jeremiah during the temporary withdrawal of the Babylonians (**Jeremiah 37:3**). Pashhur ben Malchijah also visited Jeremiah at the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem in 588 B.C. (**Jeremiah 21:1**).

2. (:2) Jeremiah's Prophecy of God's Judgment = Doom and Gloom

"Thus says the LORD, 'He who stays in this city will die by the sword and by famine and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans will live and have his own life as booty and stay alive.'"

No great choices here at this point in their rejection of God; but at least there is an option that saves their lives

Mackay: The Lord's message has been consistent throughout. Of course, by saying that continued resistance was futile and by urging the people to align themselves with the enemy forces, Jeremiah was uttering what the officials could interpret only as high treason. But Jeremiah's message was not born out of a lack of patriotism, or out of fear for his personal safety, or for some personal advantage. He was the loyal spokesman of the Lord, and he had a deep concern for the well-being of his people. They could not escape the impending catastrophe, but they could rescue their own lives by prompt surrender to the Babylonians. Whatever would then happen to them would not be glorious or grand, but it would be better than the horrors of life in a city under prolonged siege or the massacre that would ensue when the city fell.

3. (:3) Jeremiah's Guarantee of the Capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians
"Thus says the LORD, 'This city will certainly be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and he will capture it.'"

2) The Prophet Ends Up in the Pit

B. (:4-6) Imprisonment of Jeremiah

1. (:4) False Charge Against Jeremiah = Dangerous Treason

"Then the officials said to the king, 'Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm.'"

Constable: These nobles complained to Zedekiah that Jeremiah was weakening the morale of the soldiers and discouraging the people from resisting the enemy. They accused the prophet of desiring to harm the people, rather than seeking their well-being. This was a seditious thing to do, and Jeremiah could have been put to death if his accusers proved him guilty of treason.

Kidner: It was ironical ... that the leaders who had played the traitor against Babylon, their overlord, were such sticklers for internal loyalty, and that they should profess concern for the peace and welfare (*shalom*, **Jeremiah 38:4 b**) of the citizens whom they insisted on sacrificing.

2. (:5) Feckless Condoning of Jeremiah's Punishment by King Zedekiah

"So King Zedekiah said, 'Behold, he is in your hands; for the king can do nothing against you.'"

Constable: Zedekiah turned Jeremiah over to the nobles. He claimed he could not overrule their will. Obviously he should have stood up for Jeremiah, but he feared his state officials (cf. **Jeremiah 38:25-27**). He was an early-day Pontius Pilate who washed his hands of his responsibility (cf. **Matthew 27:24**).

3. (:6) Forcible Casting Jeremiah Into the Depths of the Muddy Cistern

“Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchijah the king’s son, which was in the court of the guardhouse; and they let Jeremiah down with ropes. Now in the cistern there was no water but only mud, and Jeremiah sank into the mud.”

Cf. treatment of Joseph by his brothers in **Gen. 37**

Thompson: The final intention of the officials was to bring about Jeremiah’s death without bloodshed.

Ryken: A cistern, of course, is an underground cavity for storing rainwater. . . The cisterns of Jeremiah’s day were usually bottle-shaped, with a narrow opening at the top and a large round cavern underneath. They were often fifteen feet deep or more. This cistern must have been a deep one, because Jeremiah needed to be lowered into it by ropes.

3) Deliverance Can Be Surprising

C. (:7-13) Rescue of Jeremiah

1. (:7-9) Courageous Intervention by Gentile = Ebed-Melech

“But Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch, while he was in the king’s palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. Now the king was sitting in the Gate of Benjamin; and Ebed-melech went out from the king’s palace and spoke to the king, saying, ‘My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet whom they have cast into the cistern; and he will die right where he is because of the famine, for there is no more bread in the city.’”

Ryken: Ebed-Melech was a nobody. He was a Cushite, to being with. Cushites were Gentiles, black Africans from Ethiopia or Sudan. So Ebed-Melech was an alien in Judah. Plus, he was a eunuch in the royal palace. Perhaps he was in charge of Zedekiah’s harem, but in any case he as a slave, and very likely an emasculated slave. We may not even know his name, for “Ebed-Melech” simply means “*servant of the king.*” It was not much of a name. Even if it was the man’s proper name, it shows that he had not identity of his own. His status as a human being was completely defined by his relationship to his owner.

2. (:10-13) Commanding Instructions by the King to Release Jeremiah

“Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, ‘Take thirty men from here under your authority and bring up Jeremiah the prophet from the cistern before he dies.’ So Ebed-melech took the men under his authority and went into the king’s palace to a place beneath the storeroom and took from there worn-out clothes and worn-out rags and let them down by ropes into the cistern to Jeremiah. Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, ‘Now put these worn-out clothes

and rags under your armpits under the ropes'; and Jeremiah did so. So they pulled Jeremiah up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern, and Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse."

Feinberg: Granted that all thirty men would not have been needed to lift Jeremiah from the cistern, they would have been a sufficient guard to discourage the officials from intervening. Apparently the king expected some opposition from them.

Parunak: (:1-13) This section shows us in stark detail just how weak and spineless Zed is. There are two paragraphs, each following exactly the same structure. Someone "hears" something concerning Jer; speaks with the king about him, and as a result changes Jer's status. Throughout the episode, Jer is a silent, uncomplaining prop, serving to contrast the agents in the two paragraphs: the wicked princes who wish to destroy him, and a nameless foreign slave who saves his life. . .

What boldness from a servant, to oppose the plotting of the nobles! Reminiscent of the Israelite slave of Naaman's wife who directed her master to Elisha (**2 Kings 5**), not only for the healing of his leprosy, but also for faith in Yahweh (**2 Kings 5:17**).

II. (:14-28) JEREMIAH'S INTERACTION WITH KING ZEDEKIAH

4) The Truth Can Be Unpleasant

A. (:14-16) Secret Interrogation – Asking for Honest Disclosure of God's Word

1. (:14) Plea for Honest Disclosure

"Then King Zedekiah sent and had Jeremiah the prophet brought to him at the third entrance that is in the house of the LORD; and the king said to Jeremiah, 'I am going to ask you something; do not hide anything from me.'"

Parunak: Zed sends for Jer to speak with him. Note the place of the rendezvous: "*the third entry of the house of the Lord,*" some obscure back door to the temple. This is not a public audience in the throne room, but a clandestine consultation in a back alley. Zed doesn't want anyone to know what he is talking to Jer about.

MacArthur: God's Word was surrender, and His answer for rejection was calamity for Jerusalem, capture of the king, and tragedy for his family plus others of the palace.

Feinberg: This was Zedekiah's last meeting with Jeremiah. It is not a duplicate of **37:17-21** because of differences of time and circumstance.

2. (:15) Barriers to Honest Disclosure

a. (:15a) Fear of Reprisal

"Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, 'If I tell you, will you not certainly put me to death?'"

b. (:15b) Frustration at Expected Rejection

“Besides, if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.”

Parunak: These are the two great concerns that probably keep most of us silent concerning the things of God: fear for what others will think of or do to us, and frustration and discouragement over lack of response when we do speak.

3. (:16) Promise of Protection

“But King Zedekiah swore to Jeremiah in secret saying, ‘As the LORD lives, who made this life for us, surely I will not put you to death nor will I give you over to the hand of these men who are seeking your life.’”

5) The Options Can Be Unpopular

B. (:17-18) Unpopular Options

1. (:17) Option #1 = Surrender and Live

“Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, ‘Thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel, If you will indeed go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then you will live, this city will not be burned with fire, and you and your household will survive.’”

Mackay: If he complies with the divine word, he is given three divine guarantees: his own life would be spared, his family would be spared, and the city would escape conflagration. None of these were automatic consequences of his surrender. On the contrary those who rebelled against an overlord such as Nebuchadnezzar would normally be subject to harsh and humiliating treatment, especially when they had held out against him for a long time. Subject kings were frequently mutilated and then killed to discourage others from rebelling. The Lord promises to intervene to modify the Babylonian treatment of Zedekiah and Jerusalem, but it would take faith in the word Jeremiah has brought for the king to venture on that promise.

2. (:18) Option #2 = Resist and Die

“But if you will not go out to the officers of the king of Babylon, then this city will be given over to the hand of the Chaldeans; and they will burn it with fire, and you yourself will not escape from their hand.”

6) The Arguments Must Be Evaluated

C. (:19-23) Persuasive Arguments to Obey the Lord

1. (:19-20) Dealing with Fears of Reprisal Associated with Obedience

“Then King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, ‘I dread the Jews who have gone over to the Chaldeans, for they may give me over into their hand and they will abuse me.’ But Jeremiah said, ‘They will not give you over. Please obey the LORD in what I am saying to you, that it may go well with you and you may live.’”

2. (:21-23) Describing Severe Consequences of Disobedience

“But if you keep refusing to go out, this is the word which the LORD has shown me: Then behold, all of the women who have been left in the palace of the king of Judah are going to be brought out to the officers of the king of Babylon; and those women will say,

*‘Your close friends have misled and overpowered you;
While your feet were sunk in the mire, they turned back.’*

They will also bring out all your wives and your sons to the Chaldeans, and you yourself will not escape from their hand, but will be seized by the hand of the king of Babylon, and this city will be burned with fire.”

Parunak: Your women will mock you. You are afraid of mockery from the surrendered Jews. How will you feel when your own harem scolds you for how your “friends,” the princes who urge resistance, have misled you and left you in the lurch?

Wiersbe: Jeremiah assured the king that if he obeyed the Word of the Lord, God would protect him and the city. But if he disobeyed, even the women in the palace would taunt him before the Babylonians (:21-23).

7) Strange Bedfellows Can Keep a Secret

D. (:24-27) Sworn to Secrecy

1. (:24) Cutting a Deal

“Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, ‘Let no man know about these words and you will not die.’”

2. (:25-26) Coaching Jeremiah How to Respond to the Opposing Officials

“But if the officials hear that I have talked with you and come to you and say to you, ‘Tell us now what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us and we will not put you to death,’ then you are to say to them, ‘I was presenting my petition before the king, not to make me return to the house of Jonathan to die there.’”

3. (:27) Carrying Out the Deception

“Then all the officials came to Jeremiah and questioned him. So he reported to them in accordance with all these words which the king had commanded; and they ceased speaking with him, since the conversation had not been overheard.”

Thompson: The officials heard of the visit of Jeremiah to Zedekiah and were told the one part of the total conversation which did not concern them greatly. In fact, Jeremiah had made a strong pleas to be removed (**37:20**). This silenced the officials, and the more sensitive part of the interview as not reported. Jeremiah was allowed to remain in the court of the guard till Jerusalem fell, and Zedekiah returned to the palace to suffer the anguish of knowing what was right to do but lacking the courage to do it.

(:28) Epilogue = Fate of Jeremiah

“So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guardhouse until the day that Jerusalem was captured.”

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How can we increase our boldness so that we don't compromise God's truth when under pressure?
- 2) Where have you seen weak governing officials fail to do what they know is right?
- 3) What lessons do we learn from the intervention of Ebed-Melech?
- 4) Why did Jeremiah go along with the king's wishes not to fully disclose the details of their interaction?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kidner: The king's capitulation to his princes (**5**) was perhaps the most abject surrender in biblical history ... until the moment when Pilate washed his hands before the multitude (**Mt. 27:24**). The consigning of Jeremiah to the mud pit was intended as a gradual and revolting death; but the king wanted no knowledge of it; and the princes, lowering their victim by ropes, took care to let death arrive by natural causes.

Peter Wallace: Surrender or Die (continued)

3. Zedekiah's Third Inquiry (38:1-13)

a. “Sinking in the Mud”: Jeremiah in the Cistern (v1-6)

They claim that Jeremiah is not seeking the “shalom” – the peace of the city. He is a traitor against the king and against the people. Zedekiah realizes that he cannot stand up to the officials – his words reflect a standpoint of weakness – *“the king can do nothing against you”* – so he allows them to throw Jeremiah into a cistern, where he will die.

There is a certain irony in this chosen form of death: Back in **chapter 2, verse 13**, the LORD had said through Jeremiah: *“my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”* Now, when it comes time to put Jeremiah to death, they throw him in a cistern that holds no water.

You may have noticed that the house of Shaphan has been remarkably absent from the narrative. Last time we saw how Jeremiah was repeatedly protected by the house of Shaphan. There is no mention of them here. Perhaps they believed Jeremiah – and left

the city! (Certainly, we will hear in the next chapter that Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, will be appointed the governor of Judah immediately after the Babylonians take the city). It is clear that Gedaliah was at least already in communication with the Babylonians – and quite possibly already outside the city with the besieging army! But this means that there are no Jews still inside the city who will speak up for Jeremiah. And so therefore, it falls to an Ethiopian eunuch – Ebed-melech, whose name simply means “*servant of the king*.” And Ebed-melech comes to Zedekiah and says (v9)

b. Jeremiah Rescued by an Ethiopian Eunuch (v7-13)

The same king who was swayed by his officials to permit Jeremiah’s death sentence is now swayed by his Ethiopian eunuch to permit Jeremiah’s rescue. And the story is told in great detail in **verses 11-13**. An ordinary man in ordinary health could be rescued by a rope. But Jeremiah has been prophesying for nearly 35 years. He is now an old man – and there is no bread in the city – so he is now a feeble old man. He will not be able to “climb” out – he must be pulled – lifted. Why do we get this detail? Because you need to see the picture of a feeble old prophet nearly spent with hunger and mistreatment. Abandoned and alone – with only a foreigner – only an Ethiopian eunuch who will speak for him. Here at the end of all things, the frail prophet will speak with the king one last time.

c. “Now Your Feet Are Sunk in the Mud” – Zedekiah’s Dilemma (v14-28)

i. You Want to Know – But Are You Willing to Do It? (v14-16)

Notice where we are. The third entrance of the temple for Zedekiah’s third question. I like the way **Walter Brueggemann** describes this meeting: “There is a genuine effort by both king and prophet to communicate and even to accommodate. The stakes are now too high for acrimony. Nobody has anything to win in this conversation by abrasiveness. In the end the prophet and the king share in the struggle for a truth that will save the city.” (364-365)

The king said to Jeremiah, “*I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me.*” 15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “*If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me.*” The problem is that Zedekiah has never listened before! Oh, sure, he “listened” – but he did not obey – he did not do what God said! And so far, every time that Jeremiah has spoken, maybe Zedekiah didn’t order his death – but Zedekiah was willing to allow his death!

16 *Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah, “As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life.”* I wonder what Zedekiah’s question was! Because no sooner does Zedekiah promise to protect Jeremiah, then Jeremiah launches into his final oracle! Zedekiah never gets around to asking the question! You must remember this! You may think that you want to know. You may think that you want to hear the word of the LORD. But unless you are willing to do the word of the LORD, unless you are willing to obey – the word of the LORD will remain obscure. And so Jeremiah doesn’t wait for the question! He repeats the basic core of what he has said to Zedekiah for more than a decade:

ii. Whom Do You Fear? Whose Word Matters Most to You? (v17-23)

You haven't listened yet – but fine, I'll say it one more time! **Surrender, or die.** The message of the prophets is that Jerusalem must perish. The only way for Israel and Judah to live is for them to pass through death and exile. If you surrender, then it will be better. If you resist, then it will be worse. Notice, that I said nothing about “easier.” Death and judgment is never easy. Exile and death is hard. But if you surrender it will be better. And if you resist it will be worse.

This is what we learn finally in the cross of Jesus. There was nothing “easy” about “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?!*” But it was better! Because in the cross of Jesus – for the first time! – a Son of David willingly and freely listened, heard, and obeyed the Word of God from first to last! Zedekiah was not willing.

19 King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “*I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them and they deal cruelly with me.*” In other words, I'm afraid of the house of Shaphan! They were right – I was wrong – how do I know that they won't deal cruelly with me? And Jeremiah says, in effect, “Trust me – and better yet, trust the LORD. Please, for the first time in your life, obey – hear – listen to the voice of the LORD. Surrender OR DIE.

You trusted your friends – the very same officials who have tried to kill me. Why do you keep listening to lies? Why do you keep hearing lies? Why do you keep obeying lies?! I need to ask you the same question! Whom do you fear? Whose word matters most to you? What is getting in the way of hearing the voice of the LORD? Whose words matter to you more than the word of God? Zedekiah was one who eagerly pursued “hearing” the word of the Lord – and yet refused to “hear” the word of the Lord. He would not do what God said. What do you do with someone who will not listen – who will not obey?

iii. What Do You Do with Those Who Will Not Listen? (v24-28)

Zedekiah knows that the officials will hear of this secret talk, and so he tells Jeremiah to keep secret the majority of their conversation. And Jeremiah does as the king had instructed him. When they ask Jeremiah about the conversation, he says, “I made a humble plea to the king that he would not send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.” There is a measure of truth here. After all, Jeremiah did ask the king to spare his life. But at the same time, Jeremiah does not tell the whole truth to the officials. They do not deserve the whole truth. They would use the truth to destroy life and harm God's people. The ninth commandment – “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” – does not require you to tell everyone everything that they might wish to know!

Zedekiah's three questions provide us with a tragic model of what God's people should do. First, “*please pray for us to the LORD*” – Lord, have mercy on our situation. Second, “*Is there a word from the LORD?*” – what does God say about our situation? And third, what must we do to be saved? – what does God call us to do in our situation?

I call it a tragic model – because Zedekiah did not follow through. This is why we need a better Son of David. We need Jesus – the great King who listened to the word of God – he heard and he obeyed. And because he was obedient – even unto death – therefore he was raised by the Father into everlasting life. And for those who are in Christ, we should indeed pray that God will have mercy on our situation; we should inquire what does God say about our situation? and we should seek what God calls us to do in our situation.

Parunak: Summary

Review the main characters and what we have learned from each.

1. The princes of Jerusalem. Unlike the princes under Jehoiakim, they are concerned only for their own prestige, and provide no leadership for the people in spiritual matters. Let us be sure that we use positions of leadership as a stewardship from God, not to advance ourselves.

2. Zedekiah. Because he seeks to please men rather than God, he waffles back and forth, and in the end is powerless to choose even what is best for himself. Let us resolve to steer by the star of God's Word, whatever people around us say, for only then will we be consistent and able to bring blessing both to ourselves and to those around us.

3. Ebed-Melech. A foreigner, a slave, mutilated in body and excluded from the formal signs of fellowship with God, yet he is the hero of this story. Let us remember that God has chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things to confound the things that are mighty, and base things, and things that are despised, yes, and things that are not, to confound the things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence (**1 Cor. 1:27-29**), and let us be careful neither to reject his humble servants, nor to fear to be thus thought of ourselves.

4. Jeremiah. He is willing to be God's pawn in the story; bears without complaining the tremendous suffering that is brought to him (contrast his confessions earlier); speaks boldly the message God has given him, without fear of personal consequences. Let us pray for God's Spirit so to strengthen and use us to glorify him.

Daryl Hilbert: Zedekiah's Final Meeting

I. CONTEXT

A. Chapters 37-39 are prophecies from the reign of Zedekiah, dealing with events and messages during the siege and capture of Jerusalem (Feinberg)

B. The events recorded in this chapter [38] took place near the end of the siege of Jerusalem. As tensions mounted in Judah, the anti-Babylonian group at court wanted to do away with their chief opponent, Jeremiah. (Feinberg)

C. In chapter 37 we have the captivity of the prophet, in chapter 39 that of Zedekiah. (Feinberg).

II. OFFICIALS APPREHENDED JEREMIAH (1-6)

A. Officers Heard Jeremiah (1) - Most likely these were the leading officials of a larger group. Gedaliah may have been the son of Pashhur who had Jeremiah beaten and put in stocks (Jer 20:2, 6). Jucal (Jehucal) was mentioned in Jer 37:3.

B. Leave Jerusalem or Die (2) - They thought Jeremiah was a traitor and that his prophecies were treasonous.

C. Jerusalem Will Be Captured (3) - Jeremiah was more loyal than they could comprehend, giving them prophecies (“thus says the Lord”) that would save their lives.

D. Officials Wanted Jeremiah Put to Death (4) - Instead of concerning themselves with the Lord’s prophecies, the officials thought Jeremiah was discouraging (lit. “weakening the hands”) the men of war and seeking their harm. They called for his death. Politicians are often obtuse to spiritual issues, and Judah’s leaders never saw that the Exile was God’s way of using the Babylonians to purge the nation of idolatry (Feinberg).

E. Zedekiah Handed Him Over to Officials (5) - In his own situation, Zedekiah was to “weak in the hands” to withstand the plan of the officials.

F. Jeremiah Cast into Cistern (6) - So, they took Jeremiah out of the court of the guardhouse and put Jeremiah in a cistern. It was owned by Malchijah the king's son, most likely a prince. The cistern did not have water in it, but it did have mud in which Jeremiah sank. The majority of water cisterns are plaster-lined, although unlined cisterns dug into impermeable rock have also been discovered in the central hill-country of early Israel (Biblical Archaeology Library).

III. EBED INTERVENES FOR JEREMIAH (7-13)

A. Ebed-melech Overheard Officials (7) - Ebed-melech was an Ethiopian eunuch in the king’s palace. Eunuchs (saris) were court officials who at times guarded the royal harem and were able to enter the king’s presence. He had heard about Jeremiah’s persecution.

B. Ebed-melech Spoke to King (8-9) - Ebed-melech reported the actions of the wicked officials to the king. The sad reality was that Jeremiah would probably die from the conditions of the damp cistern and lack of bread. This foreigner cared more for God’s prophet than did his own people. As a result of Ebed-melech’s boldness, the Lord delivered his life in Jer 39:15-18.

C. King Commanded Jeremiah’s Release (10-11) - The king was influenced by Ebed to release Jeremiah from the cistern. Ebed took thirty men to rescue him.

D. Jeremiah Hoisted Out of Cistern (12-13) - Ebed had both compassion and wisdom when he took old clothes and rags to put under the armpits of the prophet. The clothes

and rags would give cushioning under Jeremiah's arms when they pulled him out of the cistern with ropes. Jeremiah was placed again in the court of the guardhouse.

IV. ZEDEKIAH'S SUMMONS JEREMIAH (14-23)

A. Zedekiah Questioned Jeremiah (14) - Zedekiah called once more for Jeremiah. It would be the king's final meeting with Jeremiah. Perhaps Zedekiah was inquiring to see if the Lord had changed His mind.

B. Jeremiah Questioned Zedekiah's Motives (15) - Jeremiah was no coward, but he did doubt the king's true motives. Jeremiah stated that if he told the king the truth that the king would have him put to death. Jeremiah also questioned the motives of the king because the king had not listened to Jeremiah's advice.

C. Zedekiah Promised Not to Put Jeremiah to Death (16) - The king promised not to put Jeremiah to death. In fact, Zedekiah swore by the living Lord to keep his promise. The king also promised to protect Jeremiah from the hostile officials who were seeking his life. It is difficult to imagine the king boldly carrying out his promise when he had to make it in secret.

D. Surrender/ Live, Resist/Burn (17-18) - Jeremiah told Zedekiah the same message that he had been telling him all along. Those who surrender to Nebuchadnezzar would be spared, but those who stayed in the city and resisted would die. In addition, Jerusalem would be burned.

1. 597 B.C. - At the very beginning of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 24:1, 8-10).
2. 594-593 B.C. - In the fourth year ("beginning") of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 27:1, 12-15).
3. 588-587 B.C. - In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 21:3-10).
4. 587 B.C. - In the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, beginning of the siege (Jer 32:1-5).
5. 587-586 B.C. - In the last years of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 37:7-10, 17).
6. 586 B.C. - In the last year of Zedekiah's reign (Jer 34:1-5).
7. 586 B.C. - In the last year of Zedekiah's reign and last meeting with Jeremiah (Jer 38:17-18).

E. Zedekiah Fearful of Deserters (19) - Zedekiah confided that he feared the deserters perhaps more than the Chaldeans. He feared that the Chaldeans would give him over to the Jewish deserters. Their animosity was against Zedekiah for not listening to the Lord to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

F. Obey the Lord and Don't Fear (20) - Jeremiah comforted Zedekiah in that he would not be given over to the deserters. But he admonished Zedekiah to obey the Lord and submit to Nebuchadnezzar so that he would live.

G. If You Refuse You Will Be Rebuked (21-22) - Zedekiah should have been concerned about was obeying the Lord. Otherwise, Zedekiah would be lambasted by the palace women. Zedekiah would be rebuked for listening to disobedient officials and

false prophets. Similar to Jeremiah, Zedekiah would be stuck in the mire (figuratively) with no escape or friends to help him.

H. If You Refuse Your Family Will Be Taken (23) - If Zedekiah refused to listen to the Lord, then his wives and sons would be taken. Zedekiah himself would not escape his captors. In addition, Jerusalem would be burned. Chapter 39 will be the fulfillment of the words of this prophecy.

V. IMPRISONMENT UNTIL FALL OF JERUSALEM (24-28)

A. Zedekiah Said Tell No One (24) - Zedekiah still persisted in disobedience and asked Jeremiah not to reveal the words of his prophecy to the officials.

B. Do Not Tell Officials (25-26) - If the officials asked Jeremiah, he was to tell them he requested not to go back to the house of Jonathan to die in that cell.

C. Officials Questioned with Jeremiah (27) - Jeremiah was questioned by the officials and told them only about his request and nothing more (cf. Jer 37:15-16, 20). Jeremiah did not lie but divulged only what was permitted and appropriate.

1. Jeremiah did not fall into lying deception here. What he said was true though he did not divulge all details of the conversation, to which the princes had no right (MSB).

2. We must be extremely reluctant to fault a true prophet of God like Jeremiah—a man of courage, brotherly love, patriotism, tremendous spiritual stature, and unparalleled devotion. In his defense the following facts need to be considered.

- 1) The precarious position of the king must be taken into account.
- 2) To allay suspicion was as much in the king's interest as in his own.
- 3) Jeremiah's answer was not a falsehood because the petition was implied in vv.15-16 (so Laetsch).
- 4) At this critical time, the king did not want to occasion a break between himself and his generals (so Payne Smith).
- 5) Actually, the officials had no authority to question either the king or the prophet.
- 6) The officials wanted to use the information for evil purposes.
- 7) Jeremiah told only what was necessary and no more.
- 8) It was his way of bolstering Zedekiah's battered morale [so Cunliffe-Jones] (Feinberg).

D. Jeremiah Stayed in Guardhouse (28) - Jeremiah remained in the court of the guardhouse until Jerusalem was captured by the Babylonians

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

A. Don't Fear Men and Obey the Lord (Jer 38:18-20) –

1. Zedekiah was more fearful of men than the Lord (Pro 29:25). He should have been fearful of the Lord.
2. Zedekiah would be blamed for following the disobedient officials and false prophets.

3. Following false prophets does bring consequences.
 - a. Beware of false prophets (Mat 7:15)
 - b. False prophets are a sign of the end times (Mat 24:24)
 - c. False Prophets bring destruction upon themselves and their listeners (2Pe 2:1).

B. Cannot see the Lord's Will with Spiritual Blindness

1. Whether its politics, popular opinion, or Christian churches, without a relationship with the Lord and spiritual discernment there will be spiritual blindness.
2. Spiritual blindness prevents anyone from seeing and following the Lord's will.

C. Surrender/ Live or Resist/Burn (17-18) –

1. The truth of God's judgment is never pleasant, especially to those who will experience it.
2. Surrender/Live or Resist/Burn is a gospel message. If we surrender and trust Christ as our Lord and Savior, we will have eternal life. But those who resist and reject the Lord's salvation will burn (Rev 20:15).
3. We must have the truthfulness, boldness, care, and concern like Jeremiah to share the truth of the gospel.

D. No time to be weak

1. Believers cannot be weak like Zedekiah in spiritual matters.
2. It is time to be like Ebed-melech and care about God's Word and God's servants who preach the word. It is time to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15).

TEXT: Jeremiah 39:1-18

TITLE: DEVASTATION VS DELIVERANCE

BIG IDEA:

FAITH DETERMINES THE OUTCOME OF EITHER DEVASTATION OR DELIVERANCE

INTRODUCTION:

King Zedekiah and his fellow countrymen in Jerusalem were given every opportunity to respond to the repeated prophecies of Jeremiah warning of impending devastation at the hands of the Chaldeans. But they chose to rely on their own rose-colored predictions of safety and protection within the walls of God's chosen city. This passage reminds us that God will always keep His promises – both promises of devastation and promises of deliverance. The dividing line is faith. Where do we place our ultimate confidence? Here we see how even an obscure Gentile like Ebed-Melech plays the role of a hero because of his faith in God. The devastation exacted against King Zedekiah and the citizens of Jerusalem stands in stark contrast to the providential protection provided to this one Gentile and to Jeremiah, God's faithful prophet.

FAITH DETERMINES THE OUTCOME OF EITHER DEVASTATION OR DELIVERANCE

I. (:1-10) DEVASTATION

A. (:1-3) Capture and Occupation of Jerusalem

1. (:1) Siege of Jerusalem

“Now when Jerusalem was captured in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it;”

Longman: Ancient warfare strategy attests going over walls by ladders, picking out stones so the wall would collapse, and digging under the walls.

2. (:2) Timestamp for the Breaching of the City Wall

“in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the city wall was breached.”

3. (:3) Occupation of Jerusalem

“Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came in and sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-sar-ezer, Samgar-nebu, Sar-sekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon.”

Adam Clarke: The city of Jerusalem stood upon two hills, Sion to the south, and Acra to the north, with a deep valley between them. The gate of the center, as the term seems

plainly to import, was a gate of communication in the middle of the valley, between the two parts of the city, sometimes called the higher and the lower city. The Chaldeans entered the city on the north side by a breach in the walls, and rushing forward and posting themselves in this gate, in the very heart or center of the city, became thereby masters at will of the whole. Zedekiah with his troop, perceiving this, fled out of the opposite gate on the south side.

B. (:4-5) Capture of Zedekiah

1. (:4) Flight

“When Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, they fled and went out of the city at night by way of the king’s garden through the gate between the two walls; and he went out toward the Arabah.”

Adam Clarke: There were two roads from Jerusalem to Jericho. One passed over the mount of Olives; but, as this might have retarded his flight, he chose the way of the plain, and was overtaken near Jericho, perhaps about sixteen or eighteen miles from Jerusalem. He had probably intended to have passed the Jordan, in order to escape to Egypt, as the Egyptians were then his professed allies.

2. (:5) Pursuit and Capture

“But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and they seized him and brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him.”

MacArthur: Nebuchadnezzar’s command headquarters were 230 miles to the North of Jerusalem.

C. (:6-10) Conquering Atrocities

1. (:6) Death

“Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes at Riblah; the king of Babylon also slew all the nobles of Judah.”

Maclaren: But to make the sight of his slaughtered sons the poor wretch’s last sight, was a refinement of gratuitous delight in torturing.

2. (:7) Debilitation

“He then blinded Zedekiah’s eyes and bound him in fetters of bronze to bring him to Babylon.”

Constable: quoting **Keown** - **Jeremiah 39** presents a strong contrast between faithfulness and the lack of faith. Jeremiah and Ebed-melech represent those who are faithful to the LORD and to whom the LORD is faithful in return. Zedekiah represents faithlessness. In some respects, Zedekiah’s faithlessness is of the most troublesome sort among people of faith. His faithlessness is not rejection of the LORD but an inability to act in courage when pressures mount. Like the church at Laodicea in **Revelation 3:15**

[which was also blind], Zedekiah was neither hot nor cold, and he paid a terrible price for his indecision.

3. (:8) Destruction

“The Chaldeans also burned with fire the king’s palace and the houses of the people, and they broke down the walls of Jerusalem.”

Parunak: Destruction of the walls is important: it removes the ability of a city to make war. Recall in Neh the political complications that surrounded the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. A settlement without walls is just a town, guaranteed to be under someone else. With walls, it becomes a city-state, capable of some claim to independence.

Constable: Back in Jerusalem, the Chaldeans burned the royal palace, the other houses in the city, including the temple (**Jeremiah 52:13**), and broke down the city walls to make it uninhabitable and indefensible. Thus began "*the times of the Gentiles*" (**Luke 21:24**), the period in history during which Israel is under Gentile control, which will continue until Christ’s second coming.

Feinberg: The Fall of Jerusalem was so important that Scripture relates it four times – here, in **chapter 52**, in **2 Kings 25**, and in **2 Chronicles 36**.

4. (:9) Deserters Carried Into Exile

“As for the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried them into exile in Babylon.”

5. (:10) Destitute Provided for in Judah

“But some of the poorest people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard left behind in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at that time.”

Constable: It was in Babylon’s best interests to maintain the agricultural productivity of Canaan.

Kidner: The Babylonians needed to keep some balance between reprisals and reconstruction, since chaos would be in no-one’s interests: hence the distribution of land to those who could work it (**10; cf. 52:16**), and the appointment of an acceptable governor.

II. (:11-18) DELIVERANCE

A. (:11-14) Deliverance of Jeremiah

1. (:11-12) Charge of Protection Issued by the King

“Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, saying, ‘Take him

and look after him, and do nothing harmful to him, but rather deal with him just as he tells you.”

2. (:13-14) Release from Imprisonment

“So Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard sent word, along with Nebushazban the Rab-saris, and Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the leading officers of the king of Babylon; they even sent and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guardhouse and entrusted him to Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to take him home. So he stayed among the people.”

B. (:15-18) Deliverance of Ebed-melech

1. (:15-16a) Prophecy Delivered Thru Jeremiah

“Now the word of the LORD had come to Jeremiah while he was confined in the court of the guardhouse, saying, ‘Go and speak to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, saying, Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ”

2. (:16b) Pronouncement of Coming Disaster on Jerusalem

“Behold, I am about to bring My words on this city for disaster and not for prosperity; and they will take place before you on that day.”

3. (:17-18a) Promise of Deliverance for Ebed-melech

*“But **I will deliver you** on that day, declares the LORD, and you will not be given into the hand of the men whom you dread. For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your own life as booty,”*

Parunak: Echoes **17:5-8** -- The earlier portion pointed out the futility of trusting in man and the blessedness of trusting in the Lord. Now the nobles of the city, who trusted in Pharaoh to deliver them, are destroyed, while this humble slave is guaranteed his life.

Thompson: This small unit (**:15-18**) belongs properly with the story of Ebed-melech in **38:1-13**. Why it was placed in the present context is not clear unless it was that the editor wished to show that Ebed-melech (**39:15-18**), like Jeremiah himself (**39:11-14**), survived the fall of Jerusalem recorded in **39:1-10**.

4. (:18b) Pivotal Faith in the Lord

*“‘because you have **trusted in Me,**’ declares the LORD.”*

Kidner: As a postscript to the oracle for Ebed-melech, we can notice that it says nothing of the heroism, the compassion or the resourcefulness of his rescue-operation, outstanding though these were: only of the faith in God that was the mainspring of them all.

David Platt: This is the essence of the Christian message, the message all throughout

the Bible. **Trust in God and be saved.** This is what God is saying to His people over and over and over again all throughout the Old Testament. In fact sin came into the world when what happened? God's people, His creation, Adam and Eve did not trust in Him. And yet, in **Genesis 3**, God gave this promise that He would send a savior who would crush the serpent and from the very beginning then, God is calling these people to trust in His promises, and that is what we see over, and over, and over again. And so when we get to the New Testament and we hear Jesus proclaiming the good news of salvation that comes from God, what's the message? **Repent and believe.** Turn from yourself and trust in God.

Mackay: We can tell that throughout Ebed-Melech was motivated not just by humanitarian concerns for Jeremiah, but by his commitment to the Lord, foreigner though he was. . . Ebed-Melech's readiness to risk his life for what he though was right before God is rewarded by his deliverance (**Mark 8:35**). Jerusalem, Zedekiah and his officials had a misplaced confidence in their own ingenuity and political dexterity, and as a result they had been overwhelmed.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why is the downfall of Jerusalem so significant?
- 2) Why would King Nebuchadnezzar treat Jeremiah with so much respect and special considerations?
- 3) How should we respond when God's timetable for fulfilling prophecy seems delayed according to our timetable?
- 4) How does the commendation of Ebed-Melech's faith contribute to our understanding of the "*times of the Gentiles*?"

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peter Wallace: The Fall of Jerusalem (39:1 – 40:6)

After all the fervent emotion of the prophet Jeremiah throughout the whole book, this is a remarkably emotionless telling of the story. If you want to hear the same story told in all its pathos, we could pause here and spend a few weeks in the book of Lamentations: The book of Lamentations takes five chapters to reflect on the Fall of Jerusalem. . .But Jeremiah 39 is a cold factual account devoid of prophetic passion – and totally lacking in the "jeremiad" – the recounting of Jerusalem's sins. Indeed, in the whole account of the destruction of Jerusalem in **verses 1-14**, there is no reference to God – no reference to sin – only a simple, bare, factual account of the events.

Why so simple? Because by this point, it would be redundant. Jeremiah has been telling us over and over that God's judgment is coming against Jerusalem. Sometimes you just need to lay out the plain, unvarnished facts. If you want to compare the fall of Jerusalem with other biblical events, this one is up there with the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, the conquest of Canaan. Though, of course, all of those events were judgments against the nations. This is the son of God – the people of God – the temple of God. God is bringing judgment against his own people.

There is no other event to compare it to – until you come to the cross of Jesus. The destruction of Jerusalem was a picture of God's wrath against the sin of his people. As such, it also points to the cross of Jesus. And as God forsook his only Son at the cross, so also he turned away from Jerusalem – and remained silent.

1. The Final Judgment (v1-10)

a. The End of the 18-Month Siege (v1-3)

As we have seen, the “dated” sections of Jeremiah all come from the period after Baruch takes over as Jeremiah's scribe. It would appear that Baruch provides most of the narrative summaries in this section. The events in chapter 39 take several months to play out. There are 18 months in between verse 1 and verse 2. But we will find out later – in chapter 52 – that there was a whole month after the fall of the city before the burning of the houses (referred to in verse 8). So this is a highly compressed account of events – and many other things happened that are left out. That means that we should pay attention to what is said!

And the first point is that the siege lasts for 18 months! Eighteen months. For a year and a half Jerusalem was scavenging for food. The bread ran out – and the people tried to find anything they could eat. Rats, old leather – even dirt – since at least it fills the stomach... I will refrain from giving all the gory details of what people will eat when they get desperate! Because the text passes over that – and moves straight to the breach of the wall.

And then we are given the names of the Babylonian officials: Nebu-sar-sekim the Rab-saris is an official whom we know from Babylonian sources as well. Rab-saris means “chief eunuch” – one of the most powerful officers in Nebuchadnezzar's court. We also know of Nergal-sar-ezer – because he was a high official who, 25 years later, became king of Babylon! And “Rab-mag” means “chief magi.” In other words, we need to see that these are the great officials of Babylon. It was not some rag-tag band of outlaws who took down the city of God. It was an 18-month siege by the mightiest army of the age. Remember that, because that will be important in what God says at the end of our passage. But when Zedekiah sees that the walls are breached, he bolts!

b. The Judgment Against Zedekiah (v4-7)

Even at the very end, Zedekiah refuses to surrender. He tries to escape – leaving the people behind! But the army of the Chaldeans sees him – and gives chase – finally catching him on the plains of Jericho. Zedekiah had been installed as King by Nebuchadnezzar because his brother and nephew had been too pro-Egypt.

Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah King with the understanding that Zedekiah would be pro-Babylon! Zedekiah failed to keep his end of the bargain – and now he has cost the King of Babylon eighteen months of siege warfare – not to mention all the hassle of conquering the rest of Judah. That’s expensive. And all the plunder in Jerusalem will probably not cover the cost to Babylon.

What should the king of Babylon do to the former vassal who rebelled?! Zedekiah and his sons, and the nobles of Judah, were taken to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah – about 50 miles north of Damascus. The LORD had told Zedekiah through Jeremiah in **34:2-3** “*Behold, I am giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire. You shall not escape from his hand but shall surely be captured and delivered into his hand. You shall see the king of Babylon eye to eye and speak with him face to face. And you shall go to Babylon.*”

And so at Riblah in the land of Hamath, Zedekiah saw the king of Babylon eye to eye. And there Nebuchadnezzar passed judgment: Zedekiah would watch as his sons were put to death before his eyes. And then he would watch as the nobles of Judah were slaughtered before his eyes. And that would be the last thing that Zedekiah would ever see! Jeremiah had told him repeatedly – “you will not listen.” Zedekiah had refused to hear – or to obey – the word of the LORD. He refused to hear – and now he would be unable to see. He was taken in chains to Babylon – and there he died. There are none so blind as those who will not see! There are none so deaf as those who will not hear! Zedekiah did not listen – and so he wound up blind and in chains. **Verses 8-10** then speak of what happens to the people and the city of Jerusalem:

c. The Judgment Against the People and the City (v8-10)

It’s important to recognize that all of this takes time. **Ch 52** tells us that the burning of the city took place a month after the wall was breached. So the point is that even as Zedekiah – the Son of David – is forced to watch his sons be slaughtered – so now the rest of the people must watch as their city wall is broken down, and their homes are burned.

In **Ezekiel 33:21**, a fugitive from Jerusalem comes to the exiles in Babylon and tells them “*The city has been struck down.*” Ezekiel says that this happened in the 12th year of their exile, in the tenth month. In other words, the exiles only received the news six months after the fall of Jerusalem. It would take weeks to wrap up matters and get the caravans moving to Babylon. And it would take weeks to travel by foot to Babylon. And it was not a priority for the Babylonians to inform the exiles – so they only learn six months later that Jerusalem had fallen.

Meanwhile Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, has rounded up the rest of the “notables” – the landowners – those who participated in the resistance, as well as those who had deserted to him – and prepared to march them off to Babylon. This was a standard part of Assyrian and Babylonian tactics. When you capture a foreign country, you cart off its people and resettle them elsewhere – preferably some place where you can keep an eye on them – and then you give their land as a reward to your allies. If the

people of Judah behave well, then maybe someday they will be resettled in Afghanistan or Turkey! But don't ever plan on going "home" again.

It is worth noting that unlike the Assyrians with the northern kingdom of Israel, the Babylonians do not appear to have settled many foreigners in Judah. That's probably due to the fact that the hill country of Judah is not very attractive land. The northern parts of Israel – around the Sea of Galilee and the Jordan River – are the more fertile and bountiful. Judah's neighbors, Moab and Edom, seem to have allied with Babylon, and Babylon was happy to let them plunder Judah as their reward. But when we say that the Babylonians deported "the rest of the people" we need to remember that this does not include the poorest of the people. **Chapter 52** also tells us that only around 800 people were deported. The first deportation (when Ezekiel and Daniel were carried away) had removed most of the "notables." Now the rest were carried away as well. The ordinary folk – the people who "owned nothing" – were left behind. And they were given vineyards and fields.

Do you remember what we saw a few weeks ago? (**chapter 34** – the very chapter where Jeremiah prophesied that Zedekiah would be taken to see Nebuchadnezzar?!) Zedekiah had made a proclamation of liberty to the slaves. He had done what the Law required! There was only one problem. He didn't give them any land. The Law required that the freed slaves be given the wherewithal to stay free. But Zedekiah had not done that. So now Nebuzaradan – the Babylonian captain of the guard – does what the Son of David had failed to do! Deuteronomy had said that the nations should come to you and marvel at the justice of your laws. Instead, it was a pagan governor who does justice for the poor! Now the former slaves (those who owned nothing) are given the resources that will enable them to rebuild their lives. God will do justice. He may use strange tools sometimes! That theme of the 'strange tools of God' continues in part two of our passage. After all, where is Jeremiah in all this?

2. Jeremiah and the Remnant (39:11-40:6)

a. Jeremiah Spared by Nebuchadnezzar (v11-14)

Nebuchadnezzar had heard about Jeremiah. After all, from the Babylonian side, Jeremiah is their best ally! Jeremiah had persuaded dozens, perhaps hundreds, or even thousands of Jews to abandon Zedekiah and surrender to Babylon! We should take **verses 11-14** as the summary of what happened to Jeremiah – the following two oracles then give more detail about the same basic event.

So, for instance, in **verse 14** it says that they took Jeremiah from the court of the guard, and that the chief officers entrusted him to Gedaliah. In **chapter 40, verse 1**, it says that the conversation with Nebuzaradan happened at Ramah – several miles north of Jerusalem. The short version (here in **verses 11-14**) simply points out that the order came down from the top. Do whatever Jeremiah tells you. When Jeremiah heard that, he must have laughed a bitter laugh! If only there had been a son of David – a son of Josiah – who would have said that to his servants! Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, orders his servants to do what Jeremiah says! God had said through Jeremiah that those who surrendered would live. Jeremiah himself becomes the paradigm of that.

And so he is spared, and the officials entrust him to Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, the new governor. Once more, the faithful house of Shaphan comes to the rescue! But we need the next two sections to explain what this means. But first, we have some unfinished business.

b. The Word of the LORD to Ebed-Melech (v15-18)

Verses 15-18 give us the word of the LORD to Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian. Please pay attention! Because this is the only word that the LORD himself speaks to Jeremiah at this time. God has nothing to say to Zedekiah – to Jerusalem – or to any of the Jews. He only has a word for this Ethiopian eunuch – this African foreigner. Indeed, we are taken back just before the fall of Jerusalem. And now we hear that Ebed-melech – the faithful Ethiopian eunuch – who rescued Jeremiah from the pit – from the empty cistern – Ebed-melech is promised salvation. *“I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war...”* Why? Because you rescued Jeremiah? Not really. *“...because you have put your trust in me, declares the LORD.”*

Sure, Ebed-melech rescued Jeremiah because he trusted God! Ebed-melech heard and therefore obeyed the words of the LORD through Jeremiah! Trust and obey – for there’s no other way... But Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian eunuch, will live – and 600 years later, his fellow-countryman, another Ethiopian eunuch, will reap the reward for his faithfulness! Why did Ethiopia become one of the early centers of the Christian faith? Because God loves to demonstrate his faithfulness from generation to generation! And even the eunuch – who has no chance of furthering his own family – can become a fruitful tree in the garden of God! Here at the pit of Jerusalem’s history, there is a future for the one who trusts the LORD. There are only two words from the LORD in this darkest of Jewish corners. The first was the word of the LORD to an Ethiopian eunuch. The last was the word of the LORD through Nebuzaradan himself! After all, look at **verse 1 of chapter 40**:

c. The Word of the LORD through Nebuzaradan (40:1-6)

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. Who speaks? Not Jeremiah. He’s done talking! Now the Babylonian captain of the guard takes his place among the prophets! Okay, we’ve got a Babylonian King doing what the Son of David is supposed to do. And we’ve got a Babylonian soldier doing what a prophet is supposed to do. The next thing you know a Babylonian priest will show up!! (Surprise, surprise – that doesn’t happen!) Remember that the beginning of **chapter 39** highlighted the names of the Babylonian officials. It showed us that it required 18 months for the greatest army of the day to reduce the City of God to ashes.

God has always had a pattern to his revelation. First, he tells his people that he will do mighty deeds. Second, he does mighty deeds. Third, he explains to his people the mighty deeds that he has done. Nebuzaradan understands this better than you might imagine! The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, *“The LORD your God pronounced this disaster against this place. The LORD has brought it about, and*

has done as he said. Because you sinned against the LORD and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you.”

Jeremiah hears this and says to himself – “*I couldn’t have said it better myself!*” and at that point realizes that he has heard the word of the LORD from Gentile lips! And then Nebuzaradan sets Jeremiah free but invites him to come to Babylon: **vs. 4-5**

So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. You can come with me – stay with Gedaliah – or go anywhere you like! But he gives him an allowance of food and a present. He is honored by the Babylonians as a friend and a benefactor! This will do nothing to repair relationships with those who withstood the siege. Jeremiah will be viewed all the more as a traitor.

But 6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land. Jeremiah will not flee. And he will not resist Babylon. In taking this stand he remains faithful to the word that he had preached. As Brueggeman puts it, “faithfulness to God seems to some to be treason to royal Jerusalem.” (p376)

But Jeremiah never seems to feel the need to defend himself against such a charge. After all, the word of the LORD has come to pass. While Jeremiah’s words and actions might be treasonous to the king and his cronies – he is faithful to the LORD! Jeremiah’s blithe indifference to the accusation of being pro-Babylonian can only be explained by his steadfast commitment to hearing and doing the word of the LORD. Where is God in the destruction of Jerusalem? According to the prophet Nebuzaradan, the LORD is bringing judgment upon Jerusalem. According to the prophet Jeremiah, the LORD is giving comfort to Ethiopian eunuchs.

Parunak: Summary –

God’s word stands forever. This chapter stands like a capstone over the earlier prophecies of Jer to prove that heaven and earth may pass away, but God’s Word will not pass away. *Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*

1. His word is sure in judgment. He promised the siege of Jerusalem, the rule of foreigners in Jerusalem’s gate, the destruction of the city, the captivity of the people, and the capture and deportation of Zedekiah, and all came to pass.
2. At the same time, and even in the midst of these horrible judgments and suffering, his word is sure in caring for his people. He defends the poor when men who should let them down. He deliver his faithful prophet Jer. And his care for Ebed-Melech is a striking example of how he protects and watches over those who put their trust in him.
3. All of this he is able to do even by the hand of a pagan king, for our God is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He rules among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth, and no one is able to stay his hand, or challenge what he does.

TEXT: Jeremiah 40:1-16

TITLE: REMNANT THEOLOGY

BIG IDEA:

GOD ALWAYS PRESERVES, PROTECTS AND PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE

INTRODUCTION:

It is surprising when this chapter opens to find Jeremiah once more in chains. Apparently he had been scooped up along with the other Jews who were targeted for deportation. But God works thru the pagan military commander to once again preserve his life and offer him protection and sustenance in the Promised Land. In addition, God provides refuge for some of the poor and misplaced guerrilla soldiers who now are redirected to stay at home and maintain the basic agricultural economy. But all is not settled and peaceful. Gedaliah gets caught up in political intrigue and allows his trusting and naïve spirit to place him in harm's way. Even in the midst of God's providential care, dangers are lurking and wisdom must be exercised to navigate one's course.

Ryken: The events of **Jeremiah 40-41** provide a lesson in remnant theology. The main lesson is simply this: **God will preserve a remnant.** God's people may be besieged. They may be attacked. They may be oppressed. They may be scattered over the face of the earth. But they will never be lost, for God always preserves a remnant for himself. .

God not only preserves his people – he provides for them. The remnant of the Jews in Jerusalem was in a precarious position. Their very existence as a people was in jeopardy. But they had one thing going for them: God always provides for his remnant.

GOD ALWAYS PRESERVES, PROTECTS AND PROVIDES FOR HIS PEOPLE

I. (:1-6) GOD PRESERVES, PROTECTS AND PROVIDES FOR JEREMIAH – NEBUZARADAN ENCOURAGES JEREMIAH TO STAY WITH GEDALIAH IN MIZPAH

A. (:1) God's Prophet Escapes Forced Exile

“The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD after Nebuzaradan captain of the bodyguard had released him from Ramah, when he had taken him bound in chains among all the exiles of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon.”

We find it strange that Jeremiah is in captivity here in the company of the exiles that are going to be deported to Babylon. Did he subject himself to this bondage willingly in identification with his people or was this some type of mistake made by the

Babylonians?

Constable: Evidently, after Jeremiah's release in Jerusalem, Babylonian soldiers arrested him when they saw him in the city streets, supposing him to be a regular Judean.

Kidner: The name Ramah, meaning a 'height', belonged to several places, but the most likely of these would be a town about six miles north of Jerusalem, two or three miles from Mizpah.

Thompson: It would appear that there was a staging area at Ramah, the modern Er-Ram some 5 miles north of Jerusalem. From here the deportees would be set off for Babylonia.

Mackay: Regarding the heading – this heading corresponds to that in **1:1-3**, which related to the period up to the capture of the city. This is then a title for the following section of the book, up to **chapter 45**, which is deliberately presented as a supplement to the main part of Jeremiah's ministry. "Word" then does not indicate simply message, but history as well.

B. (:2-4) God's Prophet Impacted But Not Bound by Judah's Sin

1. (:2-3) Some Circumstances Can't Be Changed – You Sow What You Reap

"Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, 'The LORD your God promised this calamity against this place; and the LORD has brought it on and done just as He promised. Because you people sinned against the LORD and did not listen to His voice, therefore this thing has happened to you.'"

This pagan commander seems to have more insight into God's hand of discipline than the rulers in Judah

Parunak: He reminds Jer of why these Jews are going into captivity: because they have disobeyed the Lord. Note the plural verbs; he is speaking collectively of the nation, NOT of Jer. In fact, it's likely that he knows that this is what Jer has been preaching; Neb has likely released Jer precisely because Jer's preaching is known and he is viewed by the Babylonians as a sympathizer and supporter. So Nebuzaradan's words here have the sense, "Jer, you don't belong here. This is the punishment that God has decreed for those who disobey him; that's true of your people as a whole, but certainly not of you."

2. (:4) Some Options Remain Open for Jeremiah

"But now, behold, I am freeing you today from the chains which are on your hands. If you would prefer to come with me to Babylon, come along, and I will look after you; but if you would prefer not to come with me to Babylon, never mind. Look, the whole land is before you; go wherever it seems good and right for you to go."

C. (:5-6) God's Prophet Chooses to Remain in Judah Under the Care of Gedaliah

1. (:5) Nebuzaradan's Encouragement

“As Jeremiah was still not going back, he said, ‘Go on back then to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the cities of Judah, and stay with him among the people; or else go anywhere it seems right for you to go.’ So the captain of the bodyguard gave him a ration and a gift and let him go.”

Parunak: Jer hesitates. This strongly suggests that he is back in chains at his own choice, and he is wavering over whether to accept this offer of freedom. So Nebuzaradan encourages him more specifically to go back to Gedaliah, to whom he was originally sent (**39:14**), and even give him food and a present (\$\$?) to help him get started.

Guzik: Gedaliah was the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan. “Shaphan the grandfather was Josiah’s secretary and carried the newly found scroll to the king (**2 Kings 22:3-13**). One son, Ahikam, was part of the delegation Josiah sent to the prophetess Huldah (**2 Kings 22:12-14**). Ahikam offered protection to Jeremiah after he had preached the Temple Sermon (**Jeremiah 26:24**). It was Ahikam’s son Gedaliah who was the new governor of the Babylonian province of Judah.” (**Thompson**)

In appointing Gedaliah it was apparent that Nebuchadnezzar no longer trusted the men of the House of David. He chose a man who had administrative experience, but was not of the royal line. “It is obvious that Nebuchadnezzar had lost all faith in the house of David. His dealings with the last three kings of Judah were disappointing in the extreme.” (**Feinberg**)

2. (:6) Jeremiah's Decision

“Then Jeremiah went to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and stayed with him among the people who were left in the land.”

Jerusalem had been destroyed; Gedaliah establishing his base of operations out of Mizpah

Constable: Mizpah became the center for Nebuchadnezzar’s provincial government in Judah (cf. **Jeremiah 40:8**). Jerusalem was uninhabitable (cf. **Lamentations 2:13; Lamentations 4:1**), and Mizpah had been a political and religious center over the centuries (cf. **Judges 20:1-3; 1 Samuel 7:5-14; 1 Samuel 10:17**).

Mackay: Jeremiah was not motivated by personal ease or ambition but by a desire to see the Lord’s cause advanced among his people.

Feinberg: Jeremiah chose to stay in the land he loved. This does not mean that he doubted his own message in **24:4-10**. He loved his people in spite of their

mistreatment, hatred, and threats on his life. Now he would at least be free of ungodly priests and false prophets. His devotion to the land and his conviction that it would be the scene of future blessing influenced his decision to remain in it at this critical time.

II. (:7-12) GOD PRESERVES, PROTECTS AND PROVIDES FOR A REMNANT IN THE LAND – MILITARY COMMANDERS AND JEWS REGATHER AT MIZPAH UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF GEDALIAH

A. (:7-8) Regathering of Guerilla Military Units

1. (:7) Recognizing the Opportunity

“Now all the commanders of the forces that were in the field, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam over the land and that he had put him in charge of the men, women and children, those of the poorest of the land who had not been exiled to Babylon.”

Parunak: These are military units. The names are Jewish. “In the fields” contrasts with the armies in the city of Jerusalem. So these are guerilla units that managed to survive in the countryside.

2. (:8) Regathering at Mizpah

“So they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah, along with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, and the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, both they and their men.”

B. (:9-10) Reassuring Instructions from Gedaliah

1. (:9) Submit

“Then Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, swore to them and to their men, saying, ‘Do not be afraid of serving the Chaldeans; stay in the land and serve the king of Babylon, that it may go well with you.’”

2. (:10) Sustain

“Now as for me, behold, I am going to stay at Mizpah to stand for you before the Chaldeans who come to us; but as for you, gather in wine and summer fruit and oil and put them in your storage vessels, and live in your cities that you have taken over.”

Feinberg: Everything was being done to hasten the return to normal peaceful conditions. Notice that the invaders had shown great enlightenment in refraining from any defoliation or “scorched-earth” policy, such as in modern warfare.

C. (:11-12) Regathering of Remnant Jews

1. (:11) Recognizing the Opportunity to Remain in Judah

“Likewise, also all the Jews who were in Moab and among the sons of Ammon and in Edom and who were in all the other countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant for Judah, and that he had appointed over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan.”

2. (:12) Reaping the Harvest

“Then all the Jews returned from all the places to which they had been driven away and came to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, and gathered in wine and summer fruit in great abundance.”

III. (:13-16) PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION CAN BE REJECTED -- PLOT TO KILL GEDALIAH DISPUTED

A. (:13-14) Plot of Ishmael to Kill Gedaliah Revealed

1. (:13-14a) Widely Known Plot

“Now Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were in the field came to Gedaliah at Mizpah and said to him, ‘Are you well aware that Baalis the king of the sons of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life?’”

Guzik:

i. “Ishmael the son of Nethaniah (**Jeremiah 41:1**) was of royal heritage (cf. **2 Kings 25:23**). An enthusiastic member of the anti-Babylonian party, he was both jealous of and filled with hatred for Gedaliah.” (**Feinberg**)

ii. “Since Ishmael, the would-be executioner, was of the royal house of David, he may have been slighted in being passed over for the responsible office of governor.” (**Harrison**)

Constable: Baalis, the Ammonite king, shared Zedekiah’s antagonism for Babylon (cf. **Jeremiah 27:1-11**), so he did not want a Babylonian puppet governing Judah. Furthermore, a politically unstable condition in Judah would cause Nebuchadnezzar to concentrate his attention and troops there, rather than on Ammon.

2. (:14b) Warning Ignored by Gedaliah

“But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam did not believe them.”

Mackay: In terms of the narrative the significant point is that the new ruler of the people who at first displayed prudence and sagacity is shown to have character defects as well: he did not give due weight to well-intentioned (and accurate) warnings. Like Zedekiah who did not listen to the warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, Gedaliah does not listen to the warnings of his own officers.

B. (:15-16) Proposal to Assassinate Ishmael

1. (:15) Permission Requested

“Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke secretly to Gedaliah in Mizpah,

saying, 'Let me go and kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and not a man will know! Why should he take your life, so that all the Jews who are gathered to you would be scattered and the remnant of Judah would perish?'"

2. (:16) Permission Denied

"But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, 'Do not do this thing, for you are telling a lie about Ishmael.'"

Constable: Gedaliah refused to permit Johanan to carry out his assassination plot, because he thought Johanan was misjudging Ishmael. Gedaliah was too trusting and naive, even though he was a capable ruler and apparently a man of faith. His commitment to his own people seems to have blinded him to the political intrigues that were swirling around him (cf. **John 2:24-25**). He would have been wise to seek the Lord's will through Jeremiah and then follow it.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why such an emphasis on the preservation of a remnant in the Promised Land?
- 2) What were some of the Pros and Cons that Jeremiah would have evaluated in making his decision regarding where to live?
- 3) Where did these pagan leaders get their understanding of God's program
- 4) How could Gedaliah be so trusting and naïve regarding the plot to take his life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: **Chapters 40-44** discuss what happened after the fall of Jerusalem. In a word, they show that the people who remain in the land are no more receptive to the word of the Lord than those to whom Jer has previously preached. . .

The repeated emphasis of this chapter is how nice people can be and still not be believers. Gedaliah is a fine governor, but his failure to direct his people to the Lord at the moment of their greatest need shows that he is not a believer. Nebuzaradan is a pagan, but he can still quote scripture to Jer and persuade him on the basis of spiritual principles.

Peter Wallace: A World Without God

Where is God? For that matter, where is Jeremiah?! We know from verse 6 of chapter 40 that Jeremiah was living in Mizpah with Gedaliah. But in our whole text, neither

God nor Jeremiah shows up. Sometimes God is silent. Sometimes God allows all sorts of awful things to happen. And sometimes he does not tell us why! Sometimes you have to wait!

Last time we heard about the fall of Jerusalem very briefly – with almost no detail, and certainly no emotion! Now the narrative slows down. We hear a very detailed account of events that would appear far more trivial. For two chapters Jeremiah disappears. This is narrative history – not prophetic oracle! Not only does the narrative slow down – the narrative shrinks! In the book of Chronicles the size of the armies are gigantic. Tens or hundreds of thousands of men are waging war with each other. Here in Jeremiah the size of the armies are miniscule. Ishmael defeats Gedaliah with 10 men. He escapes with 8 men. Talk about “micro-history”!

And all through our text place matters. So we’ll pay attention to our geography as we go through the text. Because our text is setting us up for Israel return to Egypt in chapters 42-43. God had told Israel that they should never return to Egypt. And yet, the relentless burden of this section of the book of Jeremiah is to show how intent the remnant of Judah is to return to Egypt. All of Israel’s history is going backwards.

Introduction: The Remnant in the Land (40:7-12)

Our story begins with the remnant following Gedaliah – the governor. Gedaliah is repeatedly called “*the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan*” – reminding us of his connection to the noble house of Shaphan – the family that had repeatedly supported Jeremiah. Shaphan was the secretary of King Josiah who had read the book of the Law to the King – prompting Josiah’s reforms in 622 B.C. (35 years earlier).

Ahikam, Gedaliah’s father, had been a court official in 622 B.C., and had served as one of the messengers sent to the prophetess Huldah. Ahikam had protected Jeremiah, back in chapter 26. Now his son, Gedaliah, has been appointed governor of Judah.

But Gedaliah is in a difficult position. He had been one of the deserters – one of those who had left the king and surrendered to Babylon. Now the king of Babylon has appointed him as governor of Judah. How will the people of Judah respond? Our text suggests that (at least at first) they responded very well. In **verse 9** Gedaliah speaks words that are in keeping with Jeremiah’s preaching: “*Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, swore to them and their men, saying, “Do not be afraid to serve the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.”*”

Remember that God is silent. Before the fall of Jerusalem, God had said through Jeremiah, “*Submit or die.*” But now Jerusalem has fallen. The temple is in ruins. What does God require of his people now? Indeed, given that they have rebelled against him repeatedly, will he protect them now? The political realities on the ground in Judah are grim. Any hint of rebellion could call forth brutal retaliation from Nebuchadnezzar. Their neighboring enemies (Moab, Ammon, Edom) are watching for any sign of weakness to exploit. And of course, Egypt remains like the great crocodile in the Nile,

unable to venture far from the River – but ready with powerful jaws to crush any that come too near!

Gedaliah goes on to promise them that he will protect them: *“As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah, to represent you before the Chaldeans who will come to us.”* The Chaldeans – the Babylonians – will come by from time to time, and Gedaliah will represent the people of Judah at Mizpah. Mizpah is north of Jerusalem, on the main north-south route through the hill country between Jerusalem and Samaria. It is one of the northernmost cities in Benjamin, on the border with Ephraim. With the walls of Jerusalem broken down, Mizpah would be a better seat of government – certainly it would be easier to protect – and it communicates to the Babylonians that Gedaliah is not trying to rebuild Jerusalem.

But Mizpah is also a highly symbolic site. (Since Mizpah means *“watchtower”* there are several places called *“Mizpah”*). Mizpah is where Israel had gathered at the end of the book of Judges to bring judgment on Benjamin after the sin of Gibeah (**Judges 20-21**). Mizpah is where Israel had gathered twice in the book of Samuel: Samuel had called Israel to repentance at Mizpah in **1 Samuel 7**. And after Samuel had led Israel in defeating the Philistines, he set up *“Eben-ezer”* the stone of help outside the city. Mizpah is where Saul had been proclaimed king in **1 Samuel 10**. In other words, when everything was going wrong for the first generation in the land (in the days of Phineas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the high priest) Israel gathered at Mizpah – and the LORD made things right. When everything was going wrong in the days of Samuel (after the catastrophes of the judges) Israel gathered at Mizpah – and the LORD made things right. Of course, Mizpah was also one of the fortified cities of King Asa (**1 Kings 15**) who had built up the defenses of Judah against the northern kingdom of Israel. So it’s possible that Gedaliah simply chose the best fortified city still standing! But symbolically he chose the city where Israel’s great prophet and priest had gone when facing catastrophe – and the LORD had made things right.

Now that the kingdom is over – and the great catastrophe has befallen them – Gedaliah takes Israel back to the days of the Judges – back to Mizpah – and he calls Israel to heed the voice of Jeremiah. And he says to the remnant: *“But as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.”* Remember that Gedaliah is speaking to the poor – those who owned nothing. Now they have taken possession of cities they did not build, vineyards they did not plant, and wells they did not dig. They had nothing. Now they have cities, houses, vineyards, and orchards! Maybe he is thinking of how Israel came into the land and dispossessed the Canaanites! Maybe he recognizes that the rulers of Israel had become like the Canaanites – and so now the poor of Judah and Israel have inherited the land. Certainly back in **Jeremiah 2:6-7** the LORD had spoken of how he had brought Israel out of Egypt *“into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things.”*

And, at least at first, it looks like the poor heed the words of Gedaliah! As we hear in **v11-12**: Hearing that peace has returned to Judah, the refugees come home. The city of Jerusalem fell in the summer of 587 B.C. It was too late for the barley harvest – the

armies of Babylon prevented much planting in the spring – but the grapes and other summer fruits were in great abundance. So the refugees return home from Moab, Ammon, and Edom.

But another disaster awaits them. After all, the silence of God reflects the fact that God has turned his back on his children. Jerusalem and Judah are now experiencing the wrath of God due to sin. God had poured out his wrath indiscriminately on all the earth in the Flood. He had brought his last-days wrath upon the Canaanites in the Conquest. But now he focuses his judgment on his own people. Israel – God’s firstborn son – the house of David – God’s adopted son – will now bear his wrath. And not even the faithful Gedaliah can stand in the breach.

1. Love Hopes All Things: The Conspiracy Against Gedaliah (40:13-16)

Listening to the story of Gedaliah is like watching one of those slow-motion scenes where you see the disaster coming – and you want to shout out to the hero – “Stop!” You know by the end of **verse 14** that Ishmael will assassinate Gedaliah. But how do you prevent it? **Verses 13-16** tell us that Gedaliah was warned. Johanan and Ishmael were both captains of the forces in the open country (**v7-8**). These were those troops who had been outside of Jerusalem during the Babylonian invasion, and now that the Babylonians are gone, they provide defense against Judah’s old enemies – like the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites. As we see, these soldiers had mixed loyalties. Johanan was loyal to Gedaliah – but Ishmael was in the pay of the Ammonites. Ishmael was the name of Abraham’s older son by his concubine Hagar. Given that a portion of the Ishmaelites had become part of the Midianites – who were connected to the Moabites and Ammonites on the east side of the Jordan – it is not surprising to find a man named “Ishmael”! What is surprising is that Ishmael was the grandson of Elishama, “*of the royal family, one of the chief officers of the king.*” (**41:1**) We heard of Elishama the secretary back in **chapter 36** – during the reign of Jehoiakim, more than a decade earlier. But apparently there is intermarriage between the “*royal family*” and the Ammonites (or at least someone who likes the name “Ishmael”!). Since **Dt 23:3** forbade Ammonites to enter the assembly of the LORD, this is not a good sign. (And in Ezra-Nehemiah we will hear that the Ammonites became rather influential in Judah during the exile...)

So Johanan came to Gedaliah and warned him of the plot against him. The Ammonites had hired Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah. Ishmael, no doubt, wanted to get rid of Gedaliah in order to further his own ambitions. There may not be much of Judah left – but as one of the chief officers, he undoubtedly thought that he – not Gedaliah – would be a better ruler. The Ammonites had long had designs on Judah, so now, with Babylon out of the way – and the house of David out of the way – the territory of Judah would be an easy target! But Gedaliah is a trusting soul. When Johanan comes a second time and offers to kill Ishmael, Gedaliah refuses. On the one hand, Gedaliah may be naive. He is too trusting of Ishmael. But on the other hand, Gedaliah is right to forbid Johanan’s counter-plot. You do not kill someone because you fear what they may do! Love hopes all things. Yes, such love can get you killed. And that’s okay! Gedaliah is that rare political animal – an honorable man who does what is right at whatever cost to

himself. I wonder how many politicians today would do this? Of course today we tend to avoid actual assassinations. But character assassination has become ordinary. Do you know any politicians who go out of their way to defend the reputation of their opponents? We like to think that those who do what is honorable and right will prosper. (And sometimes they will – because this is still God’s world – and he designed this world so that what is honorable and right would work!) But when sin and misery have worked their corruption, then righteousness and honor will result in death. Gedaliah, the last remnant of the house of Shaphan, does honor to the family name – as he refuses to use his power to destroy the innocent – even at the cost of his own life!

Wiersbe: Why did Ishmael want to kill Gedaliah? The fact that the king of the Ammonites had hired him (**40:14**) suggests that he was making money, but much more was involved. The Ammonites had been a part of the “summit conference” in Jerusalem, where the nations allied with Judah had planned to break the Babylonian yoke (**27:1-3**). As a friend of Zedekiah and the king of Ammon, Ishmael didn’t want to see the Jewish people submit to Nebuchadnezzar even after the war had ended. He was a patriot who used his patriotism to promote his own selfish purposes.

Perhaps the key factor had to do with pride and selfish ambition. Ishmael was a descendant of David through Elishama (**41:1; 2 Sam. 5:16**), and he no doubt felt that he should have been named ruler of the nation because of his royal blood. Who was Gedaliah that he should take the place of a king? The way the Babylonians had treated Ishmael’s relative, King Zedekiah, was no encouragement to submit to their authority.

Thompson: The events of **Jeremiah 40 – 41** provide a lesson in remnant theology. The main lesson is simply this: *God will preserve a remnant.* God’s people may be besieged. They may be attacked. They may be oppressed. They may be scattered over the face of the earth. But they will never be lost, for God always preserves a remnant for himself. . .

God not only preserves his people – he provides for them. The remnant of the Jews in Jerusalem was in a precarious position. Their very existence as a people was in jeopardy. But they had one thing going for them: God always provides for his remnant.

A.F. Muir:

The whole proceedings in connection with Jeremiah's deliverance are striking and noteworthy. It is a heathen prince to whose care and respect he owes his liberation, when his own people have treated him so cruelly. Very evident is the hand of God "disposing the hearts of princes," and making "all things work together for good to them that love him."

I. JEREMIAH'S EXCEPTIONAL CASE SHOWED THAT, IN THE MIDST OF THE MOST TERRIBLE CALAMITIES, GOD IS FREE TO WORK OUT THE PEACEABLE ENDS AND GRACIOUS REWARDS OF HIS KINGDOM.

He was but one out of the entire nation, and might easily have been overlooked. Indeed, his sympathetic brotherliness had all but destroyed the advantage so specially designed

for him. An interposition like this, so marked and resolute, had an evidently supernatural origin, and bore a moral or spiritual character. If his welfare could be so thoroughly and carefully attended to in the midst of such heart rending and widely disastrous circumstances, the whole of the political changes then taking place must have been a portion of the moral order of the world, and under the direct superintendence of God. In the midst of judgment he remembers and pursues his merciful schemes. The darkest hour of a nation's or an individual's history is charged with ministries of light, and the most awful judgments do not interfere with the persistent will of God to save and to bless mankind. And how nicely adjusted and delicately balanced are the deserts of saints and transgressors!

II. SOME OF THE PURPOSES TO BE SERVED BY THIS PROVIDENCE.

1. It showed that the calamity did not arise from a mere necessity or accident of circumstances. Even the heathen Nebuchadnezzar learnt that.
2. Spiritual guidance and comfort were secured for those left behind.
3. Jeremiah learnt to perceive and obey the Divine will as respected his future. His sallies from Jerusalem proved how needful the lesson.
4. God commended his love to his servant in making good accrue to him in the general evil of the time.
5. The reverence to God and consideration towards his prophet shown by heathen princes put to shame the unbelief and disobedience of the chosen people.

Frank Wang: As we shift into the post-judgment world that Judah finds itself in, there are a couple of big questions to answer.

First, in the face of the horrors of the fall of Jerusalem, it would have been natural and right for the people, and even Jeremiah, to privately wonder if the Lord was actually living up to his promises of gathering a remnant to Himself (**Jeremiah 23**).

Second, the judgment and exile were covenant curses designed to call the people back into obedience and righteousness. The goal wasn't total destruction, but rather purifying and sanctifying. And so, will these most severe of disciplines work to bring about repentance and righteousness in the people?

TEXT: Jeremiah 41:1-18

TITLE: CHAOS WHEN IGNORING GOD'S COUNSEL

BIG IDEA:

TEMPORARY DELIVERANCE CAN STILL LEAD TO FUTURE CHAOS IF WE IGNORE GOD'S WARNINGS AND FAIL TO SEEK COUNSEL FROM GOD

INTRODUCTION:

Our broken condition as a result of the Fall means that our lives end up far messier than what we would like. On a personal level, sin brings messiness and chaos. How much more on a national level when we look at the experiences of God's chosen people do we find such messiness and chaos when God's warnings are ignored and His counsel is neglected. We can easily take false confidence from temporary deliverances and fail to depend on the Lord for guidance like we should. Sometimes the immediate pressure of the situation (like fear of reprisal from the powerful Chaldeans) causes us to violate clear commands that God has given in the past (like "Don't seek help or safety or security from the world/Egypt").

TEMPORARY DELIVERANCE CAN STILL LEAD TO FUTURE CHAOS IF WE IGNORE GOD'S WARNINGS AND FAIL TO SEEK COUNSEL FROM GOD

I. (:1-10) SLAUGHTER AT MIZPAH BY ISHMAEL – CHAOS RESULTING FROM IGNORING GOD'S WARNINGS

A. (:1-3) Killing of Gedaliah and His Associates

1. (:1) Arrival of Ishmael and His Strike Force

"In the seventh month Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family and one of the chief officers of the king, along with ten men, came to Mizpah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam."

2. (:2) Assassination of Gedaliah – the Political Appointee of the King of Babylon

"While they were eating bread together there in Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him arose and struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword and put to death the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land."

This celebration dinner was part of the enjoyment of the peaceful situation that had been brought about by the Chaldeans setting up Gedaliah to rule over the Jewish remnant that was left to maintain the agricultural economy in Judah. But this proved to be only a temporary deliverance. Chaos was about to break loose because Gedaliah had ignored the warnings about assassination plots that should have put him on the alert.

Parunak: v. 2 emphasizes that the man he has killed was appointed by the Babylonians, so this act is designed to infuriate them. Furthermore, he kills Babylonians who are associated with Gedaliah's staff as well. Clearly he is trying to offend Nebuchadnezzar.

Guzik: The coming treachery was even worse because it violated the hospitality and protection of the shared table (**ate bread together**).

Ryken: Gedaliah's death was a tragedy. For years afterward, the Jews held a fast to lament the day of his passing.

Mackay: Killing the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land points to the political implications of the assassination as a setback to Nebuchadnezzar's hopes that Judah would return to some level of normality. Babylonian reprisals could now be anticipated. Ishmael had achieved his objective of destabilizing the country, and that was very much what the Ammonites also wanted, as they had eyes on Judah's territory.

3. (:3) Additional Victims = Jews and Chaldeans with Gedaliah at Mizpah
"Ishmael also struck down all the Jews who were with him, that is with Gedaliah at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war."

Kidner: Everything about him disgraced the name of David his forebear, who had resisted every impulse to "wade through slaughter to a throne" and had awaited God's time and his people's will. This was no David but a Jehu.

B. (:4-8) Killing of 70 Innocent Pilgrims

1. (:4-5) Arrival of the Pilgrims

"Now it happened on the next day after the killing of Gedaliah, when no one knew about it, that eighty men came from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria with their beards shaved off and their clothes torn and their bodies gashed, having grain offerings and incense in their hands to bring to the house of the LORD."

Parunak: Their mourning: beards cut, clothes torn, flesh flayed, in sadness over the destruction of the temple. The first and third of these are pagan practices, forbidden in the law, **Lev. 19:27; 21:5; Deut. 14:1**. Shows how even the faithful in the Northern Kingdom were influenced by pagan practices.

2. (:6-7) Atrocity Committed

a. (:6) Deception

"Then Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went; and as he met them, he said to them, 'Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam!'"

Thompson: It was an act of sheer deceit and perfidy for Ishmael to meet the pilgrims with such a display of sympathy for them in their sorrow. By pretending himself to be overcome with grief, weeping as he went, he won their confidence. Equally deceitful was his welcome in the name of Gedaliah. The pilgrims were completely off their guard before a master of treachery who was ably supported by his henchmen.

b. (:7) Destruction

“Yet it turned out that as soon as they came inside the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and the men that were with him slaughtered them and cast them into the cistern.”

Mackay: It may be that he wanted to commit an atrocity of such a magnitude that the Babylonians had to take some action, so that the land would experience even more upheaval.

3. (:8) Avoidance of Death by 10 of the Pilgrims

“But ten men who were found among them said to Ishmael, ‘Do not put us to death; for we have stores of wheat, barley, oil and honey hidden in the field.’ So he refrained and did not put them to death along with their companions.”

C. (:9) Disrespecting the Corpses

“Now as for the cistern where Ishmael had cast all the corpses of the men whom he had struck down because of Gedaliah, it was the one that King Asa had made on account of Baasha, king of Israel; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with the slain.”

Constable: The cistern that Ishmael filled with dead bodies was one that King Asa of Judah had constructed while battling against King Baasha of Israel (cf. **1 Kings 15:22; 2 Chronicles 16:6**). Good King Asa had built the cistern to preserve life, but wicked Ishmael now polluted it by filling it with corpses. To give these pilgrims such a burial showed no respect for them.

D. (:10) Capturing the Remnant and Heading to Ammon

“Then Ishmael took captive all the remnant of the people who were in Mizpah, the king’s daughters and all the people who were left in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had put under the charge of Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; thus Ishmael the son of Nethaniah took them captive and proceeded to cross over to the sons of Ammon.”

Parunak: Having done the King of Ammon’s dirty work, he rounds up the people and leads them captive back to Ammon. Many of them had just escaped there when they learned of Gedaliah’s rule. Now they will return to an even harsher slavery.

Feinberg: Ishmael’s motive in transporting the remnant may have been threefold:

(1) to escape punishment,

- (2) to find refuge with Baalis who had instigated the assassination of Gedaliah (**Jeremiah 40:14**), and
- (3) to sell the remnant as slaves to the Ammonites.

Longman: It is possible, though only speculation, that the reason why Ishmael is taking these women to Ammon is because baalis, who is directing Ishmael here, is interested in marrying into the family of David in order to have some kind of claim on the land. Perhaps Baalis is foolishly thinking that if he, through Ishmael, destroyed the Babylonian garrison and its Judean puppets he might be able to exert hegemony over the area. This might be the significance behind the fact that Ishmael *took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.*

II. (:11-15) SALVATION OF THE REMNANT BY JOHANAN AT GIBEON – TEMPORARY DELIVERANCE

A. (:11-12) Pursuit of Ishmael

1. (:11) Focusing on Ishmael Because of His Atrocities

“But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were with him heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done.”

2. (:12) Finding Ishmael at Gibeon

“So they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah and they found him by the great pool that is in Gibeon.”

B. (:13-15) People Movement Back to Loyalty to Johanan

1. (:13) Relief – Excitement at the Arrival of Johanan and His Forces

“Now as soon as all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and the commanders of the forces that were with him, they were glad.”

2. (:14) Reversal – Expressing Loyalty to Johanan

“So all the people whom Ishmael had taken captive from Mizpah turned around and came back, and went to Johanan the son of Kareah.”

3. (:15) Retreat – Escape of Ishmael

“But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men and went to the sons of Ammon.”

III. (:16-18) SAFETY SOUGHT IN EGYPT – FUTURE CHAOS WILL RESULT FROM FAILING TO SEEK GOD’S COUNSEL

A. (:16) Mobilization – Getting the people prepared to move out

“Then Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were with him took from Mizpah all the remnant of the people whom

he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, after he had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, that is, the men who were soldiers, the women, the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon.”

Adam Clarke: These were all most probably, persons who belonged to the palace and harem of Zedekiah: some of them his own concubines and their children.

B. (:17-18) Mistake – Heading for refuge in Egypt

“And they went and stayed in Geruth Chimham, which is beside Bethlehem, in order to proceed into Egypt because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, since Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land.”

Constable: Johanan and his party intended to proceed to Egypt, because they feared that the Babylonian soldiers would retaliate and kill them when they discovered that Ishmael had assassinated Gedaliah.

Ryken: Going back to Egypt had “fatal mistake” written all over it. Jeremiah had often warned the Jews not to go to Egypt (**2:18, 36; 24:8-10**). Nevertheless, they were already halfway out the door. Maybe, they thought, it would be okay to go to Egypt just this once. So they traveled about five miles down the road. Then they started to have second thought. Should they stay or should they go?

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) When have we suffered because we failed to listen to the counsel or the warnings which the Lord provided?
- 2) What types of deception do we see in this chapter?
- 3) Why are courageous leaders like Johanan so easily tempted to seek solutions in their own strength rather than seeking the counsel of the Lord?
- 4) What was so terrible about turning to Egypt for refuge and safety and protection from the Chaldeans?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Kidner: It may seem far-fetched to draw parallels between this monster [Ishmael] and

ourselves; but here, although writ large and in blood, is the way in which even the well-meaning may be tempted to get things done, especially in corporate projects. That is, by guile rather than openness; by pressure rather than patience and prayer; in a word, by carnal weapons rather than spiritual, and towards ends of one's own choosing.

Parunak: Overview

a) **1-10**, Ishmael does what Johanan said he would. A major effort to destabilize what government remains in Judah and demoralize the few people left in the country.

b) **11-15**, Johanan thwarts his effort, but on a human scale, not by any trust in God.

c) **16-18**, Then Johanan prepares to leave the country and flee into Egypt, from fear of the Babylonians.

The notion that it is folly to look to Egypt for protection is a frequent one in the OT, and one that has application to us today. The Lord has delivered us from the *power of Satan* into a relation of *blessing with him*, one in which we must confront fleshly problems in this world. The various examples of this practice in the OT give us three important lessons, one concerning our place of blessing, one concerning the power from which we have been delivered, and one concerning the problems that we face.

1. **The patriarchal period:** *It is wrong to forsake the Lord's promises for fleshly substitutes.*

2. **Time of the exodus:** *It is wrong to look for help to the power from which the Lord has delivered us.*

3. **Monarchy:** *It is wrong to think that the answer to fleshly problems is fleshly answers.*

In the light of these lessons, consider the situation of the remnant under Yoxanan. They already know that Egypt is weaker than Neb (to say nothing of God), since Egypt could not drive off the Babylonian army during the siege of Jerusalem. God has delivered them from Neb already under Gedaliah, and he can certainly work a comparable wonder to preserve them now. They should lay hold of God's promises and not look to the flesh. But no, they will do go down to Egypt.

Summary:

If we trust in men to deliver us, we must also be prepared when they fail us. Gedaliah pointed people to his own rule and the fairness of Babylon; when he is taken out of the picture, their happiness is turned to suffering. And yet they do not learn, but turn to another human helper, Egypt, instead of to God. May the Lord give us grace to live our lives not trusting in the arm of the flesh, but in the power of God.

James Barker: GEDALIAH IS MURDERED BY ISHMAEL

1. **Jeremiah 41:1** records the date of the assassination. This would be about two months

after the burning of Jerusalem.

2. Ishmael and his ten friends were warmly welcomed by Gedaliah. "*They did eat bread together in Mizpah*" (41:1b). H.A. Ironside said, "It was like the feasting of Judas at the last passover. Those who ate bread with Gedaliah lifted up the heel against him" (Jeremiah and Lamentations).

3. While they were eating their meal together, Ishmael and his men killed unsuspecting Gedaliah with the sword (41:2).

4. Merrill Unger says this was "in gross violation of the sacred right of hospitality and in defiance of the king of Babylon's authority in appointing Gedaliah over the land" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

5. That was horrible enough, but Ishmael went on to murder all the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, as well as the Chaldeans who were there to protect Gedaliah (41:3).

6. Furthermore, Ishmael continued his brutal killing spree by killing seventy (out of a group of eighty) innocent religious pilgrims from cities in northern Israel on their way to the temple in Jerusalem (41:4- 7).

7. "*Having their beards shaven, and their clothes rent, and having cut themselves*" (41:5) indicates they were in mourning. It also indicates a corrupt form of syncretistic religion -- a mixture of Baal-worship and true worship.

8. They probably had heard the temple was destroyed and wanted to present an offering on the site where the temple had stood (41:5).

9. "With despicable hypocrisy Ishmael went forth to meet the pilgrims, pretending to share their sorrow (41:5, 6)" (Unger).

10. As soon as the travelers entered into the midst of the city of Mizpah, Ishmael and his murderous accomplices slaughtered them all and threw their dead bodies into a pit -- a cistern that had been built by King Asa three hundred years earlier (41:7; cf. verse 9).

11. Ten of the pilgrims survived by telling Ishmael they would give him "*treasures in the field, of wheat, and of barley, and of oil, and of honey*" (41:8).

12. After they finished killing the travelers, Ishmael and his men "*carried away captive all the residue of the people that were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people that remained in Mizpah*" and brought them Ammon, the land of the Ammonites (41:10; cf. 40:14).

13. Among this group of captives was Jeremiah (cf. 42:1-3).

14. When Johanan, and all the captains of the forces that were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael had done, they took off after them (41:11, 12).

15. They went to fight with Ishmael and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon (41:12). The captives were happy to see Johanan and his captains and they "returned, and went unto Johanan" (41:13, 14).

16. Ishmael, along with eight men, managed to escape and they took off for Ammon (41:15).

17. Meanwhile, Johanan and his group "departed, and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt" (41:16, 17).

18. **Verse 18** explains why they chose not to go back to Mizpah. They felt it would be safer for them to go to Egypt than to go back to Mizpah. They thought the Chaldeans might blame them for the murder of Gedaliah.

19. The book of Jeremiah does not record any reprisals from Babylon. However, I read something interesting in a book by **Irving L. Jenson**. He asks, "Is the deportation referred to in 52:30 such a reprisal?" (Jeremiah and Lamentations).

20. The first deportation was when King Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon. The second deportation is the one referred to in **Jeremiah 39** when Jerusalem was burned to the ground, the temple destroyed, King Zedekiah's sons killed before his eyes, and then his eyes put out.

21. Why a third deportation five years later?

CONCLUSION:

1. Johanan was unquestionably a brave and a patriotic man, but apparently he was not one who waited upon God for direction.

2. Without inquiring of the Lord, he led his fellow soldiers and the group he rescued from Ishmael to Chimham, near Bethlehem, the route to Egypt (41:17, 18).

3. Johanan was determined to leave the land of Palestine, fearing the wrath of the Chaldeans because of Ishmael's assassination of the governor and the Babylonian guard (41:17, 18).

4. Having first determined upon their path, Johanan and the others made a pretence of seeking the mind of the Lord (42:1-3).

5. Christians often do that. They make up their mind, then pray afterwards, when it ought to be the other way around.

Gino Geraci: When Warnings Are Ignored

Introduction

By way of reminder: Jerusalem has fallen--Jeremiah has been freed by the Babylonians; Gedaliah has been made provisional Governor of Judea. In **Chapter 40** the new Governor encourages the remnant to submit to the King of Babylon and makes his headquarters in Mizpah. When the scattered Jews hear a provisional Governor has been named--many gather to him.

Johanah--a leading Jewish soldier gets wind that Ishmael is plotting to kill the new Governor-- and that Ishmael is not acting alone. Ishmael has been hired by a foreign king to carry out the assassination. Gedaliah refuses to believe the report (**40:16**). This will put in motion not only his own tragic death but the death of many more Jews.

In this chapter Johanah's tragic warning will be fulfilled. Ishmael will kill Gedaliah (**vv.1-3**) and then kill 70 pilgrims who were making their way to the ruins of the destroyed Temple to offer sacrifice (**vv.4-9**). Ishmael will enslave many more prominent citizens (**v.10**). Johanah and other soldiers will mount a rescue and defeat Ishmael and release the captives (**vv.11-18**).

In later chapters Johanah will ask Jeremiah to pray concerning God's will as to where the people should go (see **Chapter 42:1-6**); after 10 days Jeremiah announces God's twofold will in the matter; remain in Judah and live (**42:7-12**); they need not fear the King of Babylon--or retire to Egypt and die (42:13-22); if they go to Egypt--all the bad things that have happened to them in Judah--will follow them in Egypt. Jeremiah has been a faithful shepherd; Ishmael--a deceitful traitor--and Johanah a flawed leader.

Ishmael Assassinates The Governor Gedaliah (vv.1-3)

The month is given (Tishri--corresponding to our September-October) but not the year--which has made for endless debate among Bible teachers. Did the assassination take place three months after the fall of Jerusalem or later? Conservative scholars suggest three months was not enough time to pick up the pieces, appoint the Governor and decide who was going to stay and who was going to go to Babylon (suggested date 583-582 B.C.--see 52:30).

The Governor did not heed the warnings of Johanah. Not only did he disregard the intel concerning the plot to kill him--he invited his killer to dinner.

In the Middle East hospitality is very important. You do not invite guests to eat with you and then expect them to betray you. In the Middle East the act of eating together is pledge of friendship and loyalty. Ishmael will use the Middle Eastern custom as a ruse to carry out murder.

Josephus the Jewish Historian adds some details-- "Ishmael came again to Gedaliah. . .and when he had feasted Ishmael, and those that were with him, in a splendid manner at his table, and had given them presents, he became disordered in drink, while he endeavored to be very merry with them: and when Ishmael saw him in that case, and that he was drowned in his cups to that degree of insensibility, and fallen asleep, he rose

up on a sudden with his ten friends and slew Gedaliah. . . .(Antiquities IX, x4).

Judah has been defeated, Jerusalem destroyed, the people deported, the land impoverished; and now the plot to execute the Governor is accomplished. The plot is completely successful. They kill Gedaliah and all the Jewish officials of the new government--and even kill the Babylonian guards left to guard the Governor. But this will not satisfy the blood lust awakened in the heart of Ishmael.

A little bird was flying south for the winter. It was so cold the bird froze and fell to the ground in a large field. While it was lying there, a cow came by and dropped some dung on it. As the frozen bird lay there in the pile of cow dung, it began to realize how warm it was. The dung was actually thawing him out! He lay there all warm and happy, and soon began to sing for joy. A passing cat heard the bird singing and came to investigate. Following the sound, the cat discovered the bird under the pile of cow dung, and promptly dug it out and ate it. I think you know the moral of the story.

- 1) Not everyone who drops a pile of dung on you is your enemy.
- 2) Not everyone who gets you out of the pile of dung is your friend.
- 3) And when you're in deep dung, it's best to keep your mouth shut!

Ishmael Slaughters 70 Pilgrims (vv.4-9)

The plot was so successful it took days for people to get wind of the massacre. The pilgrims were from three northern kingdom cities; Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria. Ishmael has violated the Middle Eastern custom of hospitality and will now add hypocrisy and greed to his growing list of character flaws. Why did he spare them? Greed. Shiloh was located some 18 miles north of Jerusalem; Mizpah either 4 or 8 miles--if Ishmael was planning to carry out military operations or guerilla operations--he would need food and supplies.

Have you ever taken a cross country trip with friends or family and seen a sign that says; "Historical Marker Up Ahead" or Historical Landmark? King Asa had built the cistern as part of the water supply of Mizpah--when he was fortifying the city against King Baasha of Israel (see **1 Kings 15:22; 2 Chronicles 16:6**). Archeologists digging at Tell en Nasbeh have uncovered some 50 plus cisterns.

Ishmael Enslaves Leading Citizens (v.10)

What crimes can we add to Ishmael's growing list of perverse behavior? Kidnapping. The word translated "*the king's daughters*" is princess--and does not necessarily mean Zedekiah's actual daughters (you will remember Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his sons (**chapter 39:6; 38:22**)).

Johanan's Soldiers Free The Captives (vv.11-18)

Gibeon (the hill)--this town was in the territory belonging to the tribe of Benjamin; it is mentioned in Joshua and 2 Samuel--according to Josephus it was 40 or 50 Stadia (4-6 miles) from Jerusalem (see Josephus Antiquities; VII, xi,7; Wars II, xix,1). A village called el Jib, about 5 and 1/2 miles north-northwest is believed to be the site; nearby are several excavated reservoirs and pools and lake that fills with rain in the winter (see

Andrew Blackwood; Jeremiah p.271).

Ishmael had enough force to hold them hostage and herd them along--but not enough when help drew near! Johanan showed great courage in liberating the captives. But a crack in his character will emerge in the next chapter when Johanan reveals his own lack of faith in going to Egypt. We expect bad behavior from evil men. Johanan will ignore the warnings of Jeremiah to stay in the land and not go to Egypt. How easy it is for a good man--to go down a path of rebellion and disobedience--to go astray--by turning away from the Word of God.

Chimham was one of David's mighty men--and apparently became a hotel-keeper (see **2 Samuel 19:37-38**). because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had murdered Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had made governor in the land. Johanan fears reprisals from the King of Babylon. You can't kill the Governor--appointed by the King of Babylon and expect to get away with it. Johanan decides it would be safer to withdraw with the whole group to Egypt. With this in mind they make a temporary halt at the inn at Chimham, near Bethlehem (**chapter 41:16-18**).

Conclusion

Ishmael was a cunning and ruthless man who would stop at nothing to get his way. Do you find it hard to believe that there are desperate and wicked people in this world? Johanan had enough courage to face Ishmael and want to kill him--but soon his courage will collapse and fear will overwhelm him as he faces the prospect of staying in Judah or going to Egypt. What was God's will? What was God's plan? God intended to plant and to build. Where was Jeremiah and Baruch? Probably with the band of captives. Would the new leader settle things with his fist or with his faith? Would the self-appointed leadership of Johanan point them in the wrong or the right direction?

<file:///C:/Users/bible/Downloads/Jeremiah-41-1-18.pdf>

TEXT: Jeremiah 42:1-22

TITLE: HAVE MY OWN WAY, LORD

BIG IDEA:

DISSEMBLING IN SEEKING GOD’S WILL REVEALS A HEART SET ON PURSUING ITS OWN DESIRES

INTRODUCTION:

This passage represents a perversion of that famous hymn “**Have Thine Own Way, Lord!**” For here we see God’s remnant in Judah already on the way down the forbidden road to Egypt – thinking that they know best how to protect themselves against possible reprisals by the King of Babylon. They put up a good front and seem to be sincerely seeking the Lord’s will as they solicit the intercession of the revered prophet Jeremiah. But their motivation is to try to manipulate God into allowing them to pursue their own independent desires. Despite their oaths of allegiance, they choose their human wisdom over God’s revealed will.

Parunak: These two chapters [42-43 regarding disobedience and idolatry] confirm the pervasiveness of the sin for which Judah was judged [by the destruction of Jerusalem and captivity in Babylon]. They show us that the people really were wicked. The conventional logic (cf. **Jer. 24**) was that those left in the land must be more righteous than those taken captive, since at least they get to stay in their land. These chapters highlight the sin of that remnant: *a fortiori*, the sin of those taken captive is even greater.

DISSEMBLING IN SEEKING GOD’S WILL REVEALS A HEART SET ON PURSUING ITS OWN DESIRES

I. (:1-6) TESTIMONY OF THE REMNANT THAT THEY WILL ACCEPT THE WILL OF GOD

A. (:1-3) Panic Approach to Seeking God’s Will

1. Approaching the Prophet After They Have Already Started Down the Wrong Path

“Then all the commanders of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people both small and great approached and said to Jeremiah the prophet,”

Parunak: Earlier in Jer, this phrase points to all social levels and the pervasiveness of their sin (**6:13; 8:10**), and is a keynote of the new covenant promises, showing the extent of the spiritual rejuvenation that the Lord promises (**31:34**). When we encounter the phrase here, we naturally ask, “Which will it be? Are the people all still corrupt, as in **ch. 6 and 8**? Or have they been restored, as in **31:34**?” We’ll see the answer in **44:12**, but our introduction has already anticipated it. This is the same sinful nation that merited the fall of Jerusalem.

2. Abdicating Their Relational Responsibility to Seek God's Will

"Please let our petition come before you, and pray for us to the LORD your God,"

Dangerous to fail to embrace a personal relationship with God and to instead trust in some type of intermediary relationship – shown in the reference to "*the Lord your God.*"

3. Acknowledging Their Desperate Situation

"that is for all this remnant; because we are left but a few out of many, as your own eyes now see us,"

almost sounds like a pity party; exaggerating their isolated condition instead of claiming the protection offered by their covenant-keeping Sovereign

4. Appearing to Sincerely Desire God's Will

"that the LORD your God may tell us the way in which we should walk and the thing that we should do."

As if all God has to do is say the word and they will instantly hurry to obey

Thompson: There was some degree of panic among the refugees as to what should be their next move. An oracle from Yahweh would cut short their perplexity."

Meyer: It is useless to profess our desire to know God's will, whilst in our secret heart we are determined to follow a certain course, come what may. How often do believers ask for prayer that their course may be made clear, when in point of fact they have already decided on it, and are secretly hoping to turn God to their own side!

B. (:4) Prophetic Commitment to Fully Reveal God's Will

"Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, 'I have heard you. Behold, I am going to pray to the LORD your God in accordance with your words; and I will tell you the whole message which the LORD will answer you. I will not keep back a word from you.'"

C. (:5-6) Peoples' Commitment to Fully Embrace God's Revealed Will

"Then they said to Jeremiah, 'May the LORD be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with the whole message with which the LORD your God will send you to us. Whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we listen to the voice of the LORD our God.'"

Mackay: The strength of the people's commitment given here makes their subsequent lack of compliance an even more heinous transgression.

II. (:7-18) TWO CHOICES – LIFE VS. DEATH

A. (:7-9) A Delayed Answer

“Now at the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah. Then he called for Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces that were with him, and for all the people both small and great, and said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him:’”

Constable: Perhaps the Lord waited this long to respond, to see if the people would wait for His answer, or proceed on to Egypt without it.

Adam Clarke: All this time he was waiting upon God; for it is evident the prophets could not prophesy when they pleased, any more than the disciples of our Lord could work miracles when they wished. The gift of prophecy and the gift of miracles were both dependent on the will of the Most High, and each of them was given only for the moment; and when the necessity was over, the influence ceased.

B. (:10-12) A Reassuring Promise

1. Based on Obedience

“If you will indeed stay in this land,”

2. Planted in the Land

“then I will build you up and not tear you down, and I will plant you and not uproot you; for I will relent concerning the calamity that I have inflicted on you.”

Parunak: Generally, God will build and plant them. The verbs are drawn from **1:10**, Jer’s original call, which gave him responsibility for building up and pulling down, for planting and for uprooting. They have seen what God can do in the way of uprooting and tearing down. Now his wrath has been soothed, and he is prepared to build and to plant, if they will stay there to be built and planted.

3. Protected From the King of Babylon

“Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you are now fearing; do not be afraid of him,” declares the LORD, ‘for I am with you to save you and deliver you from his hand. I will also show you compassion, so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your own soil.’”

Parunak: Application: This is an amazing promise. The captivity could have ended right here, if only this small remnant had obeyed! For a brief moment, they hold the fate of the entire nation in their hands – and they fumble it. Are we good stewards of the opportunities God gives us?

Guzik: God asked the leaders and common people to trust Him that the season of judgment had now been replaced by a season of mercy. Before the final Babylonian

conquest, the message was, surrender to exile. Now in the season of mercy the message was, trust Me and remain in the land. If they did, God would bless them with protection and goodness in your own land.

C. (:13-18) A Severe Warning

1. Based on Stubborn Rebellion

“But if you are going to say, ‘We will not stay in this land,’ so as not to listen to the voice of the LORD your God, saying, ‘No, but we will go to the land of Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the sound of a trumpet or hunger for bread, and we will stay there’; then in that case listen to the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah.”

Thompson: The mind of the refugees seemed to be made up. Their immediate fears could not be removed by Yahweh’s promises. Egypt seemed far from war, the sound of the trumpet, and the shortage of food. They could dwell there in peace. Jeremiah anticipated their reply.

2. Disaster in Egypt

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘If you really set your mind to enter Egypt and go in to reside there, then the sword, which you are afraid of, will overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are anxious, will follow closely after you there in Egypt, and you will die there. So all the men who set their mind to go to Egypt to reside there will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence; and they will have no survivors or refugees from the calamity that I am going to bring on them.’”

Ryken: Disaster would follow the remnant right down to Egypt. Everything that had happened in Jerusalem would happen on the Nile – sword, fear, famine, death, plague, disaster, wrath, cursing, horror, condemnation, and reproach.

3. (:18) Divine Wrath Exposing You to Shame and Ridicule

“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, ‘As My anger and wrath have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so My wrath will be poured out on you when you enter Egypt. And you will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach; and you will see this place no more.’”

Parunak: This collocation of the twin tragedies of death and shame is found elsewhere in **24:8-10** and **29:17-18** (which relies on **ch. 24** and its rotten fig imagery). Thus these verses are an echo of the paradox of **ch. 24**, according to which it is those who remain in the land, not those who are taken captive, who suffer the most. They are bringing the fulfillment of **ch. 24** on themselves.

Ryken: The risky choice was perfectly safe, while the easy way out was deadly

III. (:19-22) TESTIMONY OF JEREMIAH REGARDING THEIR FOOLISH CHOICE

A. (:19) Hearing Impaired – Rejecting the Clear Command From the Lord

“The LORD has spoken to you, O remnant of Judah, ‘Do not go into Egypt!’ You should clearly understand that today I have testified against you.”

Feinberg: The Lord’s message remains unchanged – stay in the land and do not settle in Egypt (v. 19). He rebukes them for asking his will with no intention of following it. The warning is unmistakable; the doom is certain (v. 20). Jeremiah shows the remnant their duplicity in asking for a message from God when they had no intention of following it. All the time they had intended doing their own will in the hope that God’s will would coincide with theirs (v. 21). So they were victims of self-deception and self-delusion. How little did they realize that in Egypt the temptation for them to worship idols – the very sin that had led to the nation’s fall – would be even stronger than before! Jeremiah also reminds them it was not he that had instituted the inquiry; they themselves were responsible for provoking the Lord’s severe answer. The passage closes with the threefold judgment of sword, famine, and plague ringing in their ears (v. 22). The issue was clear, the warning was faithfully transmitted; but the remnant were set on having their own way.

B. (:20) Hypocritical Self Deception

“For you have only deceived yourselves; for it is you who sent me to the LORD your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the LORD our God; and whatever the LORD our God says, tell us so, and we will do it.’”

C. (:21-22) Have Your Own Way = Jeremiah Abandons Them to Their Chosen Destruction

*“So I have told you today, but you have not obeyed the LORD your God, even in whatever He has sent me to tell you. Therefore you should now clearly understand that you will die by the sword, by famine and by pestilence, in the place **where you wish to go to reside.**”*

That last phrase defines the operating rationale of this remnant. Ultimately, despite their protestations of desiring the will of God and their assurances that they will submit to the revealed will of God, it all comes down to what they desire in their hearts.

Adam Clarke: The prophet assures them of safety in Judea, but destruction in Egypt, **Jeremiah 42:4-18**; and reproves their hypocrisy in asking counsel with which they had no intention to comply, **Jeremiah 42:19-22**.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How does this text apply to those individuals who seek counsel from a number of sources in search of a particular answer or direction they prefer rather than adopting a “Thus saith the Lord” type of approach?
- 2) How does the theme of building up and tearing down -- of planting and destroying -- weave itself throughout this prophetic book?
- 3) Why does the same God at times exhibit such great compassion and mercy and at other times such severe wrath?
- 4) When have we witnessed self-deception on the part of Christians seeking counsel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Constable: Many expositors believe that this remnant had already determined to proceed on to Egypt and simply wanted Yahweh's blessing (cf. **Jeremiah 43:1-3**).

"Sometimes God's people take this false approach in discerning the will of God. Instead of honestly seeking God's will, they go from counselor to counselor, asking for advice and hoping they'll find somebody who will agree with their hidden agenda." [Note: **Wiersbe**, p133.]

I tend to think their request was sincere in view of their words and the Lord's reply. It seems to me that if they had already decided to leave the land, that the Lord would have responded to them more strongly, as to hypocrites, instead of people who were in the process of making a decision.

Longman: In many ways, the form of the response follows a typical covenant structure. God is giving the people instructions (law) backed by sanctions (rewards and punishments). The fact that the people have called on God as witness to this transaction further suggests this identification. In this light, we might remember that the destruction of Jerusalem took place because Judah had broken the law of the covenant and so received the penalty of the curses. Now the remnant of Judah will have another chance.

Peter Wallace: The Rebellious Remnant

So Jeremiah says that Nebuchadnezzar will do to Egypt what he has done to Jerusalem. He will burn the temples of Egypt – and carry the people away captive. (**Ezekiel 29** goes so far as to say that Egypt shall become a desolation and a waste – “*her cities shall be a desolation forty years*” “*No foot of man shall pass through it, and no foot of beast shall pass through it; it shall be uninhabited for 40 years.*” and “*I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations*” for 40 years – **29:11-13**)

Here we encounter one of the skeptic's favorite examples of what they call "failed prophecy." Nebuchadnezzar did invade Egypt in 568 B.C. But there is no evidence for a mass deportation of Egyptians. Egypt was never uninhabited for 40 years! It appears that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, did some damage, and then left. So it seems pretty clear from the historical evidence that Nebuchadnezzar did not turn Egypt into an uninhabited desolation for 40 years.

On the other hand, Egypt was weakened by its decades of war with Babylon, and never recovered. In the 520s, the Persians invaded Egypt – and from that point on, Egypt would never be a world power again. When we went through **Ezekiel 29**, we saw that Ezekiel was saying that Nebuchadnezzar would do to Egypt what he had done to Jerusalem. And we see the same thing here in **Jeremiah 42-43**.

We should not expect to see a precise literal fulfillment of every biblical prophecy. After all, think about what Peter says in **Acts 2**, when he quotes the prophet Joel: "*And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon to blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day...*"

Yes, the gospels tell us that the sun was turned into darkness when Jesus died, but there is no account of "*blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke*" or the moon being turned to blood. The point of Joel's prophecy was clearly fulfilled in **Acts 2** – when God poured out his Spirit – even though the details were not all present. In the same way, the point of Jeremiah's prophecy should be clearly seen: You think that Egypt will protect you? Egypt cannot even protect themselves! Nebuchadnezzar will do to Egypt what he did to you – and so if you are trying to escape Nebuchadnezzar, you are running in the wrong direction!

Why do we need to hear this? Certainly it is useful for you to realize that not all biblical prophecies were intended literally. You shouldn't expect every prophecy to have a literal fulfillment. It will be fulfilled – but sometimes in a surprising way! But there is a more important reason why we need to hear the message of **Jeremiah 42-43**. Because Jeremiah is telling us: "It could have been different." Why did that event happen? Why did God allow it? Some people say, "Oh, it was the will of God!" Yes, in one sense, that is true. But it was only the will of God because of the choices that you made. God is sovereign – yes! But scripture never uses that doctrine to say that human choices are irrelevant! And – as our Sunday evening study of the Confession of Faith has shown – neither does Reformed theology! If you willfully choose to ignore the plain direction that God gives by his Word, and something bad happens because of it – then it is right to say that you deserved it.

As Peter says in **1 Peter 2:20-21**, “*For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*”

And so likewise, when you suffer unjustly – when you do good and suffer for it – this is a gracious thing. Jeremiah’s message to you is that you have a choice. If you refuse to listen to God and do what he says, then you will perish. But if you listen to his word – and do what he says – then you will live. And as long as you can still hear my voice – it’s not too late! We see both in our passage tonight. We see the rebellious remnant promised suffering for their sin. And we see the righteous remnant – Jeremiah – endures unjust suffering. And in so doing, Jeremiah shows us our need for Jesus. We need the innocent suffering servant to enter this messed up world. If the innocent can never suffer then Jesus could never suffer for us.

1. The Commanders Inquire of the LORD (42:1-6)

Look back at **41:17** – they were already intending to go to Egypt. But there seems to be some holdouts – or at least some who pointed out that the prophet Jeremiah was right there... We should inquire of the Lord! Many have pointed out the parallels between this story and the Exodus/Wilderness narrative: “the requests for intercession; the promises to obey whatever God says, only to renege on the promise very quickly; the perverse longing to go (back) to Egypt; the persistent worship of other gods; the judgment that they would not enter (or come back to) the promised land.” (Wright, 396)

Indeed, the request for intercession echoes all sorts of passages in the Exodus narrative. In **Exodus 24**, the people of God had promised to do all that the LORD commanded. And their words even echo the words of Moses in **Deuteronomy 10:22**, “*Your fathers went down to Egypt seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars of heaven.*”

Once again we are now “*but a few*” – so maybe it is proper to go down to Egypt again? Is God starting over again? And so Jeremiah promises to intercede for them: The LORD had told Jeremiah back in **chapter 7, verse 16**, “*do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.*” But now all the things that the LORD had said have come to pass. “*my anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, upon man and beast, upon the trees of the field and the fruit of the ground; it will burn and not be quenched.*” (**7:20**)

And so Jeremiah is willing to pray and intercede for the people once more. And he promises that he will tell them everything that the LORD says. Echoes of **Ex 24, Josh 24, and 1 Sam 7** – where Israel vowed to do whatever God says This is what Israel should do! Whatever God says – that’s what we will do. But what happened after **Exodus 24**? When Moses went up the mountain – the people quickly rebelled against the LORD. Or in **Joshua 24** after the conquest – as soon as Joshua dies, the people rebelled against the LORD. Or in **1 Samuel 7** when Samuel leads them against the Philistines – they then reject the LORD in **1 Samuel 8**. So we should not expect much

here. After all, the theme of Jeremiah is that the people are too much like their fathers!

In **Jeremiah 31** God promised that the days are coming “*when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke...*” (v31-32)

Hebrews 8 tells us that these days have arrived in Jesus. **Jeremiah 42** makes it clear that those days had not yet arrived in Jeremiah!

2. The Word of the LORD Came to Jeremiah (42:7-22)

a. If You Remain in the Land, I Will Build You Up (v7-12)

7 *At the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah.* Ten days. If they are worried about the Babylonian reaction to the death of Gedaliah, then ten days could feel like forever! But God is not a genie in a bottle – sometimes you have to wait for God’s answer! We want our answer now! You often hear people quote Romans 8:28 – that all things work together for good – but then others reply, “I don’t see the good!” God doesn’t promise that you will see it. He promises that he will do it – but it may take ten days – it may take ten thousand years! Will you trust him? And until that day – will you do what God tells you to do? Because that is the point of Jeremiah’s prophecy.

Jeremiah gives them two options: If you remain in the land, then God will build you up. But if you go down to Egypt, then God will destroy you. Jeremiah summons the commanders and all the people, and he tells them (v10). 8 *Then he summoned Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest,* 9 *and said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your plea for mercy before him: 10 If you will remain in this land, then I will build you up and not pull you down; I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I relent of the disaster that I did to you.*

These are the verbs of **Jeremiah 1:10** – when God called Jeremiah “*to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.*” (And we have seen the same verbs come back over and over again – e.g., **Jer 18:7-10; 31:28**) And God says “*I relent.*” 6 *I am finished with bringing disaster on you for your sins. Or perhaps “I am deeply grieved over the evil that I did to you.”*

The word “*niham*” refers to being grieved over one’s actions. It is often used to express repentance. “Relent” is fine – but it is almost not strong enough. God is saying that he does not enjoy bringing disaster (bringing bad things) against his own people. God does not delight in the death of the wicked. Bringing disaster is God’s “alien work.” Before the fall – before the entrance of sin into the world – God did not bring disaster! He only brings judgment upon sin because the alternative would be for him to be false to himself. If God never judges sin, then sin and death will win! But God’s alien work is more strange than you might think. Because the very agent of God’s wrath and curse upon Jerusalem is now the agent of God’s mercy upon the remnant!

11 Do not fear the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid. Do not fear him, declares the LORD, for I am with you, to save you and to deliver you from his hand. 12 I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and let you remain in your own land.

There is a double statement of “do not fear” Babylon. Do not be afraid of him.

Nebuchadnezzar is not where the true power is found. “Do not fear him...for I am with you to save you and to deliver you from his hand.” Here we see the sovereignty of God on display! If God has mercy on you, then Babylon’s foreign policy will show you mercy. Don’t worry about Babylon! Stay in the land. I will protect you. Do not fear him – fear the LORD! It may appear to us today that Babylon is running roughshod over the people of God. So, shall we go to Egypt? Shall we put our hope in a different political power?

Jeremiah says the same thing as Paul in **2 Corinthians 6:16** “*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’*”

b. But If You Go to Egypt, You Shall Die by Sword, by Famine, and by Pestilence (v13-18)

We know that there was a large Jewish community in Egypt from this point on. Jeremiah is not saying that those Jews are cursed by God. But Jeremiah is saying that this small remnant band now knows better than to go to Egypt. If you go to Egypt, you will die by the three great causes of doom: “*by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence.*” War, famine, and disease will strike them down.

If you want to escape from death and destruction, then stay in the land. To go to Egypt is to walk out of the frying pan into the fire. “The land, dangerous and devastated as it is, is Israel’s destiny. Anything else will lead to death” (Brueggemann, 392)

Earlier, Jeremiah had said that God would make Jerusalem like Shiloh (**ch 7**) Now, Jeremiah says that God will make the refugees like Jerusalem. If you leave now, you will never come back. “The present moment is the only chance for life in the land; if that chance is forfeited, there will be no other chance.” (B 393)

Again, this message is not given to all Jews in Egypt. This message is given to those who refused to remain in Jerusalem at this time. In many ways, this is a typical prophetic covenantal speech – if you obey you will receive covenant blessings; if you disobey you will receive covenant curses. But then comes something rather unusual for Jeremiah:

c. Jeremiah’s Commentary (42:19-22)

Jeremiah gives a direct rebuke. So far he has always relied on the “*thus says the LORD.*” Now he adds his own weary voice to his plea. These are the last words that Jeremiah spoke while still on Jewish soil. Jeremiah has been a faithful watchman declaring the word of the LORD. The people have refused to listen, and so Jeremiah now says, in effect, “Your blood be on your own heads!” I know that you are not going

to do what I say! You never have before! “Therefore know for a certainty that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to live.” You can only weep for the folly of men’s hearts!

Scott Markle: Dissembling in Prayer

Herein this remnant of Judah presented their request for prayer that the Lord their God might direct them in the way that He would have them to go. Yea, they made request for prayer that the Lord might direct them in the way of His will in order that they might obediently walk therein. Certainly, this was a good request to make. Certainly, this was the right request to make. Yet after having revealed the Lord’s answer to their request in **Jeremiah 42:7-18**, the prophet Jeremiah then presented a significant rebuke against this remnant of Judah.

Even so, in **Jeremiah 42:19-20** he proclaimed, *“The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day. For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it.”*

Herein the prophet Jeremiah accused this remnant of having dissembled in their hearts as they expressed their request for prayer. Now, to dissemble in one’s heart means to attempt to manipulate another by concealing one’s true motives under a false appearance. Even so, this remnant of Judah dissembled in their prayer request before the Lord God. Yea, they sought to manipulate the Lord God through prayer, appearing to desire His will concerning their way, while having already decided what way they intended to go. Indeed, they sought to manipulate the Lord God through prayer into agreeing with that which they already desired and had already decided.

THE RIGHT APPEARANCE

Expressing the Right Concern

In **Jeremiah 42:1-3** this remnant of Judah did indeed express the right concern in prayer – *“Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near, and said unto Jeremiah the prophet, Let, we beseech thee, our supplication be accepted before thee, and pray for us unto the LORD thy God, even for all this remnant; (for we are left but a few of many, as thine eyes do behold us:) that the LORD thy God may shew us the way wherein we may walk, and the thing that we may do.”*

They expressed the concern in prayer to know the will of the Lord. They expressed the concern in prayer to be directed in the way of the Lord’s will. They expressed the concern in prayer for the Lord to reveal His will and way unto them in order that they might walk in His way and obey His will. Certainly, this is the right concern to express in our prayer lives before the Lord our God.

Expressing the Right Commitment

In **Jeremiah 42:4** Jeremiah the prophet indicated that he would pray unto the

Lord God for them and that he would reveal the whole counsel of the Lord's answer, keeping nothing back from them. *"Then Jeremiah the prophet said unto them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray unto the LORD your God according to your words; and it shall come to pass, that whatsoever thing the LORD shall answer you, I will declare it unto you; I will keep nothing back from you."*

Even so, in **Jeremiah 42:5-6** this remnant of Judah expressed the right commitment to the Lord's answer – *"Then they said to Jeremiah, The LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not even according to all things for the which the LORD thy God shall send thee to us. Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God, to whom we send thee; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."*

They expressed the commitment to obey the Word of the Lord in this matter. They expressed the commitment to obey the Lord completely, to do according to all that the Lord God would instruct them through the prophet Jeremiah. They expressed the commitment to obey the Lord certainly, whether the Lord's instruction be "good" and to their liking, or whether the Lord's instruction be "evil" and against their liking. Certainly, this is the right commitment to express in our prayer lives before the Lord our God.

Expressing the Right Confidence

Indeed, in the closing portion of Jeremiah 42:6, this remnant of Judah expressed the right confidence concerning the Lord's will – *"That it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of the LORD our God."* They expressed the confidence that the Lord's will and way for them, as revealed by His Word, would truly be unto their well-being. They expressed the confidence in the Lord that His will and way would truly be the best way for them and the blessed way for them. They expressed the confidence that the Lord's way would be the way of His favor upon them, and thus would be the best way that they might choose. Certainly, this is the right confidence to express in our prayer lives before the Lord our God.

THE WRONG AFFECTION

Harboring the Wrong Calculation

Yet in all of their right expressions concerning the matter of prayer, this remnant of Judah had dissembled in their hearts. Indeed, in **Jeremiah 42:19-20** Jeremiah the prophet rebuked them for harboring the wrong calculation in their hearts – *"The LORD hath said concerning you, O ye remnant of Judah; Go ye not into Egypt: know certainly that I have admonished you this day. For ye dissembled in your hearts, when ye sent me unto the LORD your God, saying, Pray for us unto the LORD our God; and according unto all that the LORD our God shall say, so declare unto us, and we will do it."*

They harbored the calculation that they might deceive and manipulate the Lord God with their right expressions in prayer. They harbored the calculation that they might deceive the Lord God into thinking that they were sincere in seeking His will and way for their lives. They harbored the calculation that they might manipulate the Lord God

through their right expressions in prayer to unify His will unto their will. Yet the Lord God was not deceived and was not manipulated. Rather, the Lord God was displeased with their dissembling.

Making the Wrong Choice

Furthermore, this remnant of Judah disobeyed in their actions. Indeed, in **Jeremiah 42:21** Jeremiah the prophet rebuked them for making the wrong choice in their actions – *“And now I have this day declared it to you; but ye have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, nor any thing for the which he hath sent me unto you.”*

They made the choice to disobey the Word of the Lord that Jeremiah had delivered unto them. They made the choice not to do a single thing that the Lord had instructed through His prophet Jeremiah. They made the choice of rebellion, to disobey the Word, will, and way of the Lord God with a stubborn heart; and the Lord God was quite displeased with their disobedience.

Pursuing the Wrong Course

Finally, this remnant of Judah disregarded the Lord’s warning. Indeed, in **Jeremiah 42:22** Jeremiah the prophet rebuked them for pursuing the wrong course in the face of the Lord’s judgment – *“Now therefore know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn.”*

In **Jeremiah 42:10** the Lord God had pronounced His grace upon this remnant of Judah, saying, *“If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up: for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you.”* Yet they pursued the course of disregarding the Lord’s gracious forgiveness and gracious promise.

In **Jeremiah 42:11-12** the Lord God had pronounced His mercy upon this remnant of Judah, saying, *“Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom ye are afraid; be not afraid of him, saith the LORD: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand. And I will shew mercies unto you, that he may have mercy upon you, and cause you to return to your own land.”* Yet they pursued the course of disregarding the Lord’s merciful deliverance and merciful restoration.

Yea, in **Jeremiah 42:13-18** the Lord God presented His warning to this remnant of Judah, saying, *“But if ye say, We will not dwell in this land, neither obey the voice of the LORD your God, saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell: And now therefore hear the word of the LORD, ye remnant of Judah; Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; If ye wholly set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to sojourn there; then it shall come to pass, that the sword, which ye feared, shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt, and the famine, whereof ye were afraid, shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die. So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the*

sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them. For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; As mine anger and my fury hath been poured forth upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem; so shall my fury be poured forth upon you, when ye shall enter into Egypt: and ye shall be an execration, and an astonishment, and a curse, and a reproach; and ye shall see this place no more.”

Yet they pursued the course of completely disregarding the Lord’s warning of furious anger and fiery judgment; and the Lord God’s fiery displeasure was certainly kindled against them for their utter disregard of Him and His Word.

Yet what moved them to such dissembling, disobedience, and disregard? The answer is to be found in the closing phrase of **Jeremiah 42:22** – “*In the place whither ye desire to go and to sojourn.*” Yea, the answer is bound up in the two words “*ye desire.*” Although they had made request to be shown the Lord’s will, they had already determined and decided upon their own will. They had already determined and decided to pursue their own desire. They had no intention of submitting and unifying their desire unto the Lord’s desire. Rather, they intended that through their prayers the Lord might be manipulated into submitting and unifying His desire to their desire. Indeed, dissembling in prayer will always occur when we are unwilling to deny our own desire. In addition, such dissembling in prayer will always stir up the furious anger of our Lord’s displeasure against us.

TEXT: Jeremiah 43:1-13

TITLE: EXODUS REVERSED

BIG IDEA:

HUMAN ARROGANCE MUST BOW BEFORE GOD'S ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

INTRODUCTION:

You would like to think that God's miraculous redemption of His people from bondage in Egypt would have confirmed their hearts in submission to His providential care. But when times of pressure arise, we find the Jews fleeing back to Egypt in direct rebellion to God's revealed will. How prone our hearts are to wander and forget the faithfulness of our God. How arrogant we become at times in considering our thoughts and ways to be superior to God's revealed plan. This passage should give us pause to sincerely seek the Lord's will so as to avoid making a mess of our lives.

HUMAN ARROGANCE MUST BOW BEFORE GOD'S ABSOLUTE AUTHORITY

I. (:1-7) ARROGANCE LEADS TO FALSE JUDGMENTS AND FOOLISH LIFE CHOICES

A. (:1-3) False Judgments: Baseless Accusations Against Jeremiah

(:1) Authority and Veracity of Jeremiah's Prophecy

"But as soon as Jeremiah, whom the LORD their God had sent, had finished telling all the people all the words of the LORD their God—that is, all these words—"

Jeremiah is in the midst of still carrying out his prophetic duties faithfully

1. (:2) Accusation of Being a Lying, False Prophet

"Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, 'You are telling a lie! The LORD our God has not sent you to say, You are not to enter Egypt to reside there;'"

Arrogance leads powerful human leaders to reject God's control over their people and their circumstances; they imagine that they can pursue their agenda in opposition to God's agenda

Kidner: All along (had they realized it) they had regarded God as a power to enlist, not a lord to obey; and they still cannot believe that his will can be radically different from their own.

Mackay: Although the people and their leaders had requested that Jeremiah seek divine guidance for them in their uncertain circumstances, it is now made explicit that they were in no mood to listen to anything that ran counter to what they had already virtually decided to do.

2. (:3) Accusation of Being a Puppet of Baruch and the Chaldeans

“but Baruch the son of Neriah is inciting you against us to give us over into the hand of the Chaldeans, so they will put us to death or exile us to Babylon.”

Constable: They claimed that Baruch was the source of the advice Jeremiah had given them, rather than Yahweh. They believed that Baruch wanted the Chaldeans to slay or exile them. Baruch was Jeremiah’s scribe, and both men were loyal to Yahweh (cf. **ch 45**). Perhaps these opponents felt that Baruch was unduly influencing the prophet.

B. (:4-7) Foolish Life Choices: Blatant Rejection of God’s Revealed Will

1. (:4) Fleeing Judah in Direct Disobedience to God

“So Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces, and all the people, did not obey the voice of the LORD to stay in the land of Judah.”

2. (:5-7) Finding Refuge in Egypt in Direct Disobedience to God

“But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the commanders of the forces took the entire remnant of Judah who had returned from all the nations to which they had been driven away, in order to reside in the land of Judah—the men, the women, the children, the king’s daughters and every person that Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam and grandson of Shaphan, together with Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch the son of Neriah—and they entered the land of Egypt (for they did not obey the voice of the LORD) and went in as far as Tahpanhes.”

Byron Chesney: So, they all pack up in disobedience and journey to Egypt. They also force Jeremiah and Baruch to also go with them. This was most likely for punishment but also it would give them legitimacy in the eyes of the Egyptians. If they think the man of God is coming along with them then it must be the right thing for them to be doing.

Constable: They stopped at Tahpanhes (Gr. *Daphne*; cf. **Jeremiah 2:16**), an Egyptian frontier town in the northeastern Nile Delta region on the road from Canaan, perhaps to obtain permission to settle in the land.

Thompson: It must have been for him one of the most tragic events of his life, since it dashed forever all hopes he may have had to end his days in his homeland, where Yahweh had promised one day to restore the national life of his people.

Feinberg: Abraham's descendants returned to Egypt long after their liberation from it. With great suffering they had been delivered from their bondage in Egypt only to return there a defeated and hopeless remnant nearly nine hundred years later.

Mackay: Presumably there was already a Jewish community there – this group would not have been the first to flee to Egypt, quite apart from the Jewish propensity to move for purposes of trade. Among their fellow countrymen they would find assistance, and in Egypt they considered they were beyond Babylonian reprisals.

II. (:8-13) AUTHORITY/SOVEREIGNTY EXECUTED OVER THE LAND OF EGYPT AND ITS FALSE IDOLS

(:8) *“Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying,”*

A. (:9) Demonstration Via Major Object Lesson

“Take some large stones in your hands and hide them in the mortar in the brick terrace which is at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of some of the Jews;”

Thompson: The large stones were symbolic of a pedestal on which Nebuchadnezzar would set up his throne as a sign of his conquest of Egypt. . . The “*house of Pharaoh*” was not the royal palace as such but must have been a governor's residence or government building used by Pharaoh on his visits to the frontier town of Tahpanhes.

B. (:10) Dominion of Nebuchadnezzar as the Servant of the Lord

“and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Behold, I am going to send and get Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I am going to set his throne right over these stones that I have hidden; and he will spread his canopy over them.’”

Mackay: There are three points being made:

- 1) that Nebuchadnezzar's dominion will extend to Tahpanhes, to Egypt
- 2) his rule will have a stable and effective basis on top of the divinely placed stones
- 3) all this is to be done by divine warrant, and so will further God's purposes.

C. (:11) Devastation of the Land and Its People

“He will also come and strike the land of Egypt; those who are meant for death will be given over to death, and those for captivity to captivity, and those for the sword to the sword.”

D. (:12-13) Desecration of Egyptian Idols – Don't Worship such Impotent Objects

1. (:12a) Burning and Capturing

“And I shall set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive.”

2. (:12b) Plundering and Escaping Safely

“So he will wrap himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself with his garment, and he will depart from there safely.”

Constable: Nebuchadnezzar would do to Egypt what he had done to Judah. He would burn down the Egyptian temples and take people captive. He would capture Egypt as easily as a shepherd wraps himself with a garment, and he would depart from Egypt in safety. Some translations yield the image of the shepherd picking his cloak clean of lice, which is possibly what Jeremiah intended. In this case the figure is probably of Nebuchadnezzar picking his prey clean.

Thompson: There is a homely picture here which is well understood by those who have travelled in some parts of the Middle East. The picking of lice from one’s clothing is used to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s plundering activities when he finally invaded Egypt.

3. (:13) Shattering and Burning

“He will also shatter the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he will burn with fire.”

Byron Chesney: God instructs Jeremiah to bury these bricks in front of the men of Judah as a vivid reminder to them that they disobeyed God and now he is marking the place where Nebuchadnezzar would soon be setting up his own headquarters, right smack dab where Pharaoh’s palace is. Then he tells of destruction in Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar and the Chaldeans would do to Egypt what they did to Jerusalem.

Constable: Heliopolis was the site of the famous temple of Amon- Revelation , the sun god, which people approached by passing between two rows of obelisks.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where has God exposed arrogance in your life and in your decision making process?
- 2) Did Jeremiah go willingly into Egypt or was he taken as a captive?
- 3) How can pagan political figures be viewed as God’s “servant”?
- 4) Why do we ever think that we can avoid accountability to God and His prescribed judgments?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Chuck Smith: **Reasons for returning to Egypt**

1. Failure of faith.

- a. Faith is obedience- conviction is not faith. Belief is not always faith.
- b. Failure of faith speaks then of disobedience.
 1. They feared - (fear and faith mutually exclusive... Panic is always a sure sign of loss of certainty about God.

2. Failure of faith produces degeneracy of desire.

- a. In chapter **42:14**, Jeremiah tells them what they are thinking.
- b. What did they desire?
 1. Ease and bread.
 2. Peace at any price except war and hunger.
- c. I believe we should stand for right even if it means war.

3. Degeneration of desire leads to corruption of conscience.

- a. Cynicism instead of faith - Pessimism instead of hope.

James Barker: Jeremiah Brought to Egypt

II. THE JEWS REJECTED THE WORD OF GOD (43:1-4).

1. When Jeremiah was finished speaking, Azariah and Johanan, "*and all the proud men*" accused Jeremiah of speaking falsely (**43:1, 2**).
2. Their pride produced disobedience and contempt for the word of God, and contempt for Jeremiah the prophet of God.
3. These men had seen for many years Jeremiah was a true prophet of God but they had the audacity to accuse him of lying (**43:2**). Furthermore, they claimed that Jeremiah was being misled by Baruch, Jeremiah's friend who recorded his prophecies (**43:3; cf. 36:6**).
4. **F.B. Meyer** said, "How terrible that they should malign and misunderstand the man who had spent forty years of consistent public ministry in efforts to save them from the effects of evil counsel, and to recall them to a simple and absolute faith in the God of their fathers!" (Jeremiah).
5. Notice the repetition -- they "*obeyed not the voice of the LORD*" (**43:4, 7; cf. 42:21**).
6. In defiance of God's command, Johanan and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, including Jeremiah, down into Egypt (**43:5-7**).

III. JEREMIAH'S PROPHECY AGAINST EGYPT

1. The LORD directed Jeremiah to take large stones and to hide them in the clay in the brick kiln, which was at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah (**43:8, 9**).
2. The LORD called Nebuchadnezzar his "*servant*" (**43:10**) because King Nebuchadnezzar was the instrument God used to punish Judah and Egypt (cf. **25:9; 27:6**).
3. King Nebuchadnezzar would soon come and "*smite the land of Egypt, and deliver such as are for death to death; and such as are for captivity to captivity; and such as are for the sword to the sword*" (**43:11**).
4. Archaeologists have found a fragmentary inscription confirming

Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt.

5. Jeremiah prophesied that King Nebuchadnezzar would break up the Egyptian idols, and burn down the Egyptian temples (43:12, 13).

Peter Wallace:

3. The Response of the Commanders and All the People (43:1-7)

a. The Accusation against Baruch (v1-3)

How do they respond? The first word out of their mouths: “Lies!” When they asked him to pray for them, they said, “pray to the LORD your God.” But now they say “The LORD our God did not send you...” There are none so blind as those who will not see! They have heard the word of the LORD from Jeremiah’s lips for over 30 years. Jeremiah has spoken truth for over 30 years – but they simply will not listen! They accuse Jeremiah of being the pawn of Baruch the scribe. Jeremiah and Baruch are simply Babylonian sympathizers. They are in cahoots with Babylon. Don’t listen to that traitor! The arrogance and insolence of these men is revealed in their refusal to listen to God’s word. When God says, “This is the way – walk in it” Please don’t say “LIAR!”

b. The Remnant Returns to Egypt (v4-7)

And so we behold the refugees fleeing from the devastation and destruction of Jerusalem. All the remnant of Judah – the men, the women, the children, the princesses – all the refugees – even Jeremiah and Baruch – they took to Egypt. They would escape captivity and deportation to Babylon – and so they choose self-deportation to Egypt. But listen to the language used: “*the commanders...took all the remnant.*” The remnant had returned to live in the land – but now the commanders take the people captive. Jeremiah and Baruch – no doubt – would have preferred to stay in Judah. But they are marched off with the rest – to a forced exile in Egypt. The rest of chapter 43 – and all of chapter 44 – consist of Jeremiah’s final two oracles – and his interaction with the Egyptian diaspora.

4. The Word of the LORD: Nebuchadnezzar Will Destroy Egypt (43:8-13)

Tahpanhes is in the eastern part of the Nile delta. When Nebuchadnezzar invaded 15 years later, this would be the region where his armies would do the most damage. Heliopolis – mentioned in verse 13 – is 50 miles south – at the southern end of the delta. This oracle simply confirms the word that was given in chapter 42. God will do to Egypt what he did to Jerusalem. And he will do it through his servant, Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar, my servant! (v10)

There are very few individuals who are called “*my servant*” by the LORD. Abraham, Moses, Caleb, David, Job, Isaiah, and Nebuchadnezzar. Back in chapter 25, when Jeremiah had prophesied the 70 years of captivity, God had first spoken of Nebuchadnezzar as “*my servant.*” God had said that he would bring destruction upon Jerusalem because of Judah’s sin. And he would bring judgment through his servant, Nebuchadnezzar. Now Jeremiah says that because of Judah’s renewed rebellion God will bring his judgment upon them even in Egypt (you cannot escape from God!)

Why is Nebuchadnezzar going to come to Egypt? It is not for anything that Egypt has

done. It is because the refugees from Jerusalem have rebelled against God. God had told Abraham that all nations would be blessed through his seed. Egypt will now be cursed because of the seed of Abraham! Sure, Egypt was an idolatrous nation – but not any more idolatrous than any other nation around them! But they will now suffer because of Judah’s continued rebellion. Yes – sometimes other people suffer because of your sin and rebellion. But you cannot run away from God! Indeed, if you try to run away – you will simply bring your problems wherever you go! God longs to do you good. He does not enjoy bringing evil – bringing destruction on the earth. We see this most profoundly and most clearly in the cross of his Only Begotten Son. He will endure destruction – he will bear the curse in his own body – the innocent suffering servant.

TEXT: Jeremiah 44:1-30

TITLE: YOUR SINS WILL FIND YOU OUT

BIG IDEA:

**MAKE NO MISTAKE – GOD WILL CERTAINLY JUDGE YOUR SIN –
DON'T PICK A FIGHT WITH GOD**

INTRODUCTION:

The world is very creative in contradicting God's claim that sin will inevitably lead to divine judgment. They are willing to admit the specifics of their behavior but want to deny any accountability or any consequences deriving from their sin. They use God's gift of human reason to try to counter the testimony of history, but their convoluted arguments always have gaping holes.

How foolish it is to pick a fight with the Sovereign God. You can muster up all your commitment; you can be totally sincere in your approach; but if you choose arrogant rebellion against God's revealed will you will lose every time and pay a steep price.

Longman: One would think that the events of the past few decades would have made the people sensitive to Jeremiah's guidance and obedient to the Lord. In Judah they had witnessed God's word through Jeremiah come to a horrible reality in the destruction of Jerusalem. But in the previous chapter we observed how they continued to be hard-hearted toward the Lord and his prophet. Against God's will they fled to Egypt. In this chapter, we will learn that matters get worse still.

Mackay: Jeremiah's ministry was met with total rejection and brazen obstinacy. We are here given a very clear insight into the mindset of those who spurned the message of the Lord in that age and in ours. Their opposition involves a blatant reinterpretation of history which completely omits the fact of sin and plays down the claims of the Lord upon them. It was probably not just among the Jews living in Egypt that there were those who thought the decline in their national fortunes had begun with Josiah's reforms which were aimed at ensuring the exclusive worship of the Lord.

**MAKE NO MISTAKE – GOD WILL CERTAINLY JUDGE YOUR SIN –
DON'T PICK A FIGHT WITH GOD**

**I. (:1-14) IRREFUTABLE DIVINE LOGIC PROVING THAT SIN LEADS TO
JUDGMENT -- THREE MESSAGES FROM THE LORD**

A. (:1-6) Message #1 – God Has Clearly Judged Idolatry in the Past

(:1-2a) Introduction

“The word that came to Jeremiah for all the Jews living in the land of Egypt, those who were living in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis, and the land of Pathros, saying, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,’”

1. (:2b-3) Cause and Effect of Sin and Judgment Demonstrated in Recent History

a. (:2b) Effect: Verifiable Judgment

“You yourselves have seen all the calamity that I have brought on Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are in ruins and no one lives in them,”

Adam Clarke: The desolation of the land of Judea must have been exceedingly great when this, in almost any sense, could be spoken of it.

2b (:3) Cause: Egregious Idolatry

*“because of their **wickedness** which they committed so as to provoke Me to anger by continuing to burn sacrifices and to serve other gods whom they had not known, neither they, you, nor your fathers.”*

2. (:4-6) Judgment Preceded by Strong Warnings to Repent

a. (:4) Issuing of the Warnings

“Yet I sent you all My servants the prophets, again and again, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate.’”

b. (:5) Rejection of the Warnings

*“But they did not listen or incline their ears to turn from their **wickedness**, so as not to burn sacrifices to other gods.”*

c. (:6) Execution of the Warnings

“Therefore My wrath and My anger were poured out and burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, so they have become a ruin and a desolation as it is this day.”

B. (:7-10) Message #2 – You Are Now Guilty of This Same Sin of Idolatry

(:7a) Introduction

*“Now then **thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel,**”*

1. (:7b-8) What is the Point of Repeating the Mistakes of the Past?

“Why are you doing great harm to yourselves, so as to cut off from you man and woman, child and infant, from among Judah, leaving yourselves without remnant, provoking Me to anger with the works of

your hands, burning sacrifices to other gods in the land of Egypt, where you are entering to reside, so that you might be cut off and become a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?"

Guzik: There is also a sense of wonder in the self-destructive nature of their sin. It was true that they sinned against God, but they also terribly sinned against themselves.

Kidner: the wrath of God on the impenitent is as unwelcome to him as it is inevitable.

2. (:9) Don't You Remember How Badly Things Turned Out?

*"Have you forgotten the **wickedness** of your fathers, the **wickedness** of the kings of Judah, and the **wickedness** of their wives, your own **wickedness**, and the **wickedness** of your wives, which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?"*

Adam Clarke: It seems that the women were principal agents in idolatrous practices; for the queens - the wives, of rulers and of common people, burnt incense to the queen of heaven, (the moon), **Jeremiah 44:17**, and poured out drink-offerings to her.

Feinberg: It was **Hegel**, in the introduction to his Philosophy of History (1807), who rightly said: "What experience and history teach is this-that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it." So with these Jews in Egypt!

3. (:10) Why Do You Refuse to Repent?

"But they have not become contrite even to this day, nor have they feared nor walked in My law or My statutes, which I have set before you and before your fathers."

C. (:11-14) Message #3 – God Will Certainly Judge You in Egypt For Your Idolatry

(:11a) Introduction

*"Therefore **thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,**"*

1. (:11b) Commitment to Divine Wrath

"Behold, I am going to set My face against you for woe, even to cut off all Judah."

What a contrast to being in the place of blessing where God pledges to be for us.

Thompson: If the people had made up their minds to go to Egypt, and also to continue their idolatry, Yahweh had made up his mind to visit them with judgment

2. (:12) Complete Death, Destruction and Devastation

“And I will take away the remnant of Judah who have set their mind on entering the land of Egypt to reside there, and they will all meet their end in the land of Egypt; they will fall by the sword and meet their end by famine. Both small and great will die by the sword and famine; and they will become a curse, an object of horror, an imprecation and a reproach.”

Mackay: Where there is a clash of wills between God and man, the outcome is inevitable.

3. (:13) Consistent Punishment as Already Unleashed Upon Jerusalem

“And I will punish those who live in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine and with pestilence.”

4. (:14) Carnage Will Frustrate Your Hopes for Future Security and Prosperity

“So there will be no refugees or survivors for the remnant of Judah who have entered the land of Egypt to reside there and then to return to the land of Judah, to which they are longing to return and live; for none will return except a few refugees.”

II. (:15-23) IRRESPONSIBLE DENIAL OF DIVINE ACCOUNTABILITY

A. (:15-19) Protestation By the People

(:15) Introduction

“Then all the men who were aware that their wives were burning sacrifices to other gods, along with all the women who were standing by, as a large assembly, including all the people who were living in Pathros in the land of Egypt, responded to Jeremiah, saying,”

1. (:16-18) Arguing That Idolatry Has Led to Prosperity

a. (:16-17a) Maintaining Idolatrous Practices

“As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD, we are not going to listen to you! But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem;”

Guzik: For the Babylonians, the queen of heaven was a maternal deity connected with the moon, with family, and fertility. It is strange and shocking that Roman Catholics give Mary, the mother of Jesus, this same title and direct to her improper prayer and

veneration – sometimes even worship. We have no Biblical permission or encouragement to have any connection with the queen of heaven. Some observe that modern people worship the queen of heaven under other names: Mother Nature, Feminism, or Glamor.

b. (:17b-18) Misinterpreting History

“for then we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.”

Kidner: On a more doctrinaire plane, the secularist will blame Christianity, not the lack of it, for many of society’s ills, ascribing our frustrations and tensions to the biblical restraints and moral absolutes; seeking freedom, as did Jeremiah’s critics, not in God but from God.

Wiersbe: The men and women listening to Jeremiah tried to defend their sins by appealing to experience. They used the pragmatic argument: “If it works, it must be right.”

2. (:19) Arguing That the Religious Leadership of the Women was Supported by Their Husbands

“‘And,’ said the women, ‘when we were burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and were pouring out drink offerings to her, was it without our husbands that we made for her sacrificial cakes in her image and poured out drink offerings to her?’”

Constable: The women had carried on these idolatrous worship practices with their husbands’ full knowledge and approval (cf. **Jeremiah 7:17-19**). This was not just a women’s sin. The women seem to have meant that since their husbands approved of their actions (cf. **Numbers 30:7-15**), why should Jeremiah object? As in Solomon’s household, the women seem to have been very aggressive in pursuing idolatry, and their husbands followed their lead (cf. **1 Kings 11:1-8**).

Guzik: They tried to make their husbands responsible for their sin, in the sense that they could have stopped them if they wanted to. In the first sin, the man blamed his wife for his sin. Here the women of Judah in Egypt return the favor.

B. (:20-23) Rebuttal by Jeremiah

(:20) Introduction

“Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men and women—even to all the people who were giving him such an answer—saying,”

Mackay: There is a clash of ideologies in their differing interpretations of their recent experience. The historical facts of their economic and political history are not in dispute, but rather the basic religious presuppositions employed to structure the

perception of those facts and give coherence and meaning to them.

1. (:21) Idolatry Has Not Been Overlooked

“As for the smoking sacrifices that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your forefathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the LORD remember them and did not all this come into His mind?”

2. (:22-23) Indictment Still Stands

“So the LORD was no longer able to endure it, because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you have committed; thus your land has become a ruin, an object of horror and a curse, without an inhabitant, as it is this day. Because you have burned sacrifices and have sinned against the LORD and not obeyed the voice of the LORD or walked in His law, His statutes or His testimonies, therefore this calamity has befallen you, as it has this day.”

Parunak: (:21-22), The Lord’s memory is good. Just because Josiah proscribed idolatry didn’t guarantee that the people would repent of it. It’s one thing to legislate outward morality, but quite another to see a change in people’s hearts. They may have stopped offering, but they never repented of their earlier sin, and the Lord remembers what they did before Josiah came on the scene.

III. (:24-30) IRRESISTABLE PRECEDENCE OF GOD’S JUDGMENT OVER YOUR COMMITMENT TO IDOLATRY

(:24-25a) Introduction

“Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including all the women, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt, thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, as follows:”

A. (:25b-26) Challenge: God’s Oath to Judge Idolatry Will Crush Your Oath to Trust in Idolatry

1. (:25b) Perform Your Vows

“As for you and your wives, you have spoken with your mouths and fulfilled it with your hands, saying, ‘We will certainly perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pour out drink offerings to her.’ Go ahead and confirm your vows, and certainly perform your vows!”

You take your best shot and God will take His best shot and we will see who is left standing at the end

2. (:26) God Will Perform his Vows

“Nevertheless hear the word of the LORD, all Judah who are living in the land of Egypt, ‘Behold, I have sworn by My great name,’ says the LORD, never shall My name be invoked again by the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt, saying, As the Lord GOD lives.””

Constable: Jeremiah proclaimed a further message from Yahweh to them. If they continued to practice idolatry, they would all die. They would not be able to invoke the Lord’s name as their highest authority, as they had done ever since they had become a nation, because they would be dead. Again, the focus of this judgment was particularly the remnant that had recently fled from Judah and planned to return as soon as possible (cf. **Jeremiah 44:14**).

B. (:27-28) Challenge: God’s Word of Judgment Will Crush Your Commitment to Idolatry

1. (:27a) You Are in Big Trouble

“Behold, I am watching over them for harm and not for good,”

Not a smart move to fight against God; to claim that your word and ways are superior to God’s word and ways

2. (:27b) You Are About to Be Wiped Out

“and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt will meet their end by the sword and by famine until they are completely gone.”

3. (:28a) Only a Few Will Escape and End Up Back in Judah

“Those who escape the sword will return out of the land of Egypt to the land of Judah few in number.

4. (:28b) All Will Know That God’s Word Reigns Supreme

“Then all the remnant of Judah who have gone to the land of Egypt to reside there will know whose word will stand, Mine or theirs.”

C. (:29-30) Confirming Sign

1. (:29) Purpose of the Confirming Sign

“This will be the sign to you,’ declares the LORD, ‘that I am going to punish you in this place, so that you may know that My words will surely stand against you for harm.””

2. (:30) Prophecy of the Confirming Sign

“Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I am going to give over Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt to the hand of his enemies, to the hand of those who seek his life, just as I gave over Zedekiah king of Judah to the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy and was seeking his life.’”

Parunak (:28-30) is the acid test. They have rejected Jer’s interpretation of past history and constructed their own. Can they do as well with the future? They have sworn to offer sacrifices to the queen of heaven. Can they really carry it out (for example, of God kills them)? This is the test of prophecy, established in **Deut. 18** and used already by Jer in the duel with Hananiah in **ch. 28** (Hananiah prophesied the return of the sacred vessels within two years, while Jer prophesied Hananiah’s death within one year, and Jer won.) The prophecy in this case is the fall of the current Pharaoh to unfriendly forces, as a symbol that they also will suffer tragic deaths.

Feinberg: Chronologically speaking, these were the last prophetic words of Jeremiah recorded. Scripture is silent on what happened to Jeremiah after the events of this chapter, though tradition has been overly active. There are many legends concerning his death. One states that he was killed at Daphne. Another claims he carried away the tabernacle, hiding it in the mountains where Moses died (2 Maccabees 2:4-8). Yet another indicates he was alive with Enoch and Elijah, expected to return as a forerunner of the Messiah.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What lessons of history do you especially need to pay attention to?
- 2) Where do we see people in our culture picking a fight with God and maintaining that their way will prevail over God’s promised judgment?
- 3) Why does Jeremiah emphasize the leadership role of the women here in their practice of idolatry? What does this say about their husbands?
- 4) How would you sum up Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry – especially taking into account all of the hardships he faced without the satisfaction of much positive response on the part of his countrymen?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryken: Once again, it was Jeremiah's sad lot to have his message – Yahweh's message – rejected. "It would appear that, so far as his outward lot was concerned, the prophet Jeremiah spent a life of more unrelieved sadness than has perhaps fallen to the lot of any other, with the exception of the Divine Lord. This was so apparent to the Jewish commentators on the prophecies of Isaiah that they applied to him the words of the fifty-third chapter." (Meyer) Jeremiah was not the Suffering Servant, but he was a suffering servant to the very end.

Mackay: the acceptance of rival ideologies as displaying equal plausibility is shattered by the eschatological dimension. Present actions have future consequences which are assigned by the God of justice and holiness. Though in Jeremiah's day the fall of Jerusalem was diversely interpreted as the consequences of desertion of the Queen of Heaven, the predicted fall did in fact constitute a solemn divine warning regarding the inevitability of judgment. That is repeated here in v. 30. To act as if that is not so is to suppress basic instincts implanted in human nature regarding right conduct and accountability.

Parunak: Note the repetition in 2, 7, 11. The argument unfolds in three steps, a model of logical reasoning. You know that idolatry brings judgment; you are performing idolatry; therefore you should expect judgment. . .

(vs. 15-19) The People's Response –

Here we encounter the alternate logic. Directly rejecting Jer's syllogism, they insist that things went better for them when we were idolaters.

Three things to notice here:

1. 16, They explicitly reject the word of the Lord! Contrast 42:5-6. Back to Rom. 1: "they are without excuse." They know that they are disobeying.
2. 17-18 is their logic: When we worshipped the queen of heaven, everything went well for us. But since we stopped, things have been lousy. The reference is to the reforms of King Josiah. He purged out the false altars and proscribed worship of pagan gods. The only subsequent kings to rule more than a few months were Jehoiakim the Wicked (who burned Jer's scroll) and Zedekiah the Weak (whom Neb conquered).

By Jer's logic, Josiah's persecution of idolaters should have led to prosperity, but Josiah's rule was the beginning of the end. True, the nation has been destroyed – but was that the judgment of YHWH on idolatry (which dropped off greatly after Josiah) or the judgement of the Queen of Heaven for the affronts that Josiah made to her?

3. The leading role of the Jewish women is remarkable.

Scott Markle: The Characteristics of Rebellion Against God

1. Refusing to learn from the chastening of the Lord. 44:2-3

2. Refusing to turn at the reproof of the Lord. **44:4-6**
3. Refusing to heed the warning of the Lord. **44:7-8**
4. Refusing to submit under the authority of the Lord. **44:9-10**
5. Refusing to give up the desires of self. **44:15-17a**
6. Refusing to acknowledge the grace of the Lord. **44:17-19**
7. Refusing to consider the offense unto the Lord. **44:20-23**
8. Refusing to accept the sovereignty of the Lord. **44:24-28**

Peter Wallace: The Word of the Lord in Egypt

In the Alexandrian manuscript of Jeremiah, this is the end of the book of Jeremiah. (the oracles to the nations in **chapters 46-52** were inserted back in **chapter 25**). And as we'll see in a few weeks, the Babylonian manuscript ends with God's word to Seraiah – Baruch's brother, who was sent to Babylon with the Babylonian manuscript! But the Alexandrian manuscript ends with God's word to Baruch.

Chapter 44 takes place in 586 or 585 B.C. - after Jeremiah and Baruch are taken forcibly to Egypt. **Chapter 45** takes place 20 years earlier – in 605 B.C. – during the reign of Jehoiakim. And as **45:1** tells us, this happened around the same time as **chapter 36**, when Jehoiakim burned the scroll that Baruch wrote of Jeremiah's words. In this way **chapters 36-45** all fit together as the story of Baruch and Jeremiah.

Why is this important? Just think about what would happen if the book ended at **chapter 44**. "You're all going to die!" What happens by adding **chapter 45**? There is a way to survive the coming catastrophe on the exiles. Baruch has been faithful to the LORD. Therefore Baruch, like Joshua and Caleb in the wilderness, provides a ray of hope. God is bringing disaster on all flesh – but he will have mercy on those who fear him. **Chapter 44** is Jeremiah's final speech to the exiles in Egypt. God has sent the prophets as a gracious gift to Israel. But Israel has refused to listen. But all these things are written down for us. You are called to repent – to turn away from your idolatries. Will you listen? Will you obey?

1. The Word That Came to Jeremiah Concerning the Judeans in Egypt (44:1-14)

a. Thus Says the LORD of Hosts: Remember My Wrath Against Jerusalem (v1- 6)

In other words, Jeremiah is now speaking to the whole of the Jewish community in Egypt. And there are three parts to the word that came to Jeremiah. You see in the three times that Jeremiah says "*thus says the LORD of hosts*" (**verse 2, verse 7, and verse 11**).

And Jeremiah says that disaster and desolation came upon Jerusalem because of Judah's rebellion – and primarily because Judah worshiped other gods. And the LORD says, “*I persistently sent to you all my servants the prophets, saying, ‘Oh, do not do this abomination that I hate!’*” The prophets were God's servants – they were sent by God to warn his people and call them to repentance. And repentance would be very clear: “*to turn from their evil and make no offerings to other gods.*”

Repentance requires that you turn from evil. It's not enough to say “I'm sorry.” You also need to turn away from the evil and stop doing it! It's not that you'll never sin again – but it does mean that you will turn away from the sin! Repentance that bears no fruit is not true repentance! And Jerusalem's repentance in the days of Josiah bore no fruit. Because in the days of Josiah's sons – Jehoahaz, Jechoiakim, and Zedekiah – Jerusalem returned to their sin and rebellion. And so God brought upon Jerusalem all the destruction that he had promised.

So now what? What will Judah do in exile? And so a second time, Jeremiah says “*thus says the LORD God of hosts, the God of Israel.*”

b. Thus Says the LORD God of Hosts: Why Do You Continue to Provoke Me with Idolatry? (v7-10)

“Why do you commit this great evil against yourselves...” After all, the LORD has promised to bless those who listen to him and do what he says. Therefore, all you have to do is believe his promises and live accordingly! And yet, you insist on worshiping other gods. You refuse to worship the LORD only! Why do you provoke me to anger with the works of your hands? Why do you make offerings to other gods in the land of Egypt? Why do you want to become a curse again? Do you not remember what just happened in Jerusalem? And so for a third time, “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel” (v11):

c. Thus Says the LORD of Hosts: I Will Punish the Remnant in Egypt as I Punished Jerusalem (v11-14)

When they lived in the land, Jeremiah had said of them: “*From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain.*” (**Jer 6:13** and **8:10**) When the people came to inquire of the LORD in **chapter 42**, they came “from the least to the greatest.” And Jeremiah had promised in **chapter 31**, that in the new covenant “*from the least to the greatest*” they shall all know the LORD.

But now we hear that nothing has changed. The remnant of Judah is no different from their fathers. They have continued in their idolatry – and so they shall all be consumed. “*by the sword and by famine*” – “*they shall become an oath, a horror, a curse, and a taunt.*” “*They shall not return, except some fugitives.*”

Isn't it enough? They have lost their homes, their families, their city! They are refugees trying to make a new life for themselves! Why does God continue to pursue them with vengeance? If you rebel against the Lord – if you refuse to live the way that he created you to live! – then you will find yourself perpetuating the disaster that you are trying to

escape. I've seen this – I've done this! – if you live in rebellion, then you will experience the fruit of rebellion. Usually when the prophet spoke, the people would at least pay lip service to repentance. But verses 15-19 give us insight into the heart of rebellion.

2. Whose Word? Whose Vow? (44:15-30)

a. The Response of the People: Josiah's Reforms Didn't Work – So We're Going Back to the Old Ways (44:15-19)

It's important to pay attention to the context in **verse 15**. This is a great assembly of “*all the people who lived in Pathros*.” Pathros is Upper Egypt – the southern part of Egypt – further down the Nile. It would appear that Jeremiah traveled up and down the Nile giving his warning to the people. Either that, or else the Jews from the Upper Nile came down to Tahpanhes for some reason... But this response leaves open the question of how the Jews in the Nile Delta responded. Indeed, the Alexandrian text of Jeremiah would appear to have its origin in that region. Your brothers further south have rejected the word of the LORD. What will you do?

And they insist that they will continue in their idolatry. They will continue in making offerings to the queen of heaven, pouring out drink offerings to her – “*as we did, both we and our fathers, our kings and our officials, in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem*.”

Jeremiah had said that your fathers did not know these strange gods. But the men of Judah in Pathros insist – “Oh yes they did!” Remember the high places? All throughout Israel and Judah the people of God had worshiped at the high places. At first they had worshiped Yahweh there – but all sorts of strange practices popped up over the centuries – mixing together the worship of Yahweh with various other gods. We see evidence of this folk religion in the archeology of Judah. One inscription says “*to Yahweh and his Asherah*” – Asherah was a feminine deity – the goddess of war and agriculture. She was often paired with Baal – but apparently the people of Israel wanted a feminine deity, so they borrowed Asherah – or, in this case, the Queen of Heaven. So, as a matter of history, it is true – they and their fathers, their kings and their priests, had all worshiped the Queen of Heaven along with Yahweh.

And, if you simply look at the order of events, it would appear that Josiah reformation didn't work! Josiah destroyed the high places, reformed worship, and restored Yahweh-only worship. Thirty years later, the temple was destroyed and the people of God were exiled. Sorry, Jeremiah, we tried what you said. It didn't work. So we're going back to the old ways – the ways of our fathers. Do you see what is happening? Everyone agrees on the facts: Jerusalem was destroyed. We've been exiled. But the interpretation of the facts varies widely! And so your liturgical practice will depend on your theological interpretation of history. The Jews of Pathros are convinced that Josiah's reforms failed. What's the point of trying to please Yahweh when all he does is destroy his own people! I try to do what God says, and he just kicks me when I'm down! And now you're telling us to shape up, or he'll kick us again! Well, Jeremiah, you know what you can do with that? We have vowed to the Queen of Heaven – and we will keep our

vows! And then before declaring the word of the LORD, Jeremiah once again inserts his own commentary – his own theological interpretation of history!

b. The Word of Jeremiah – You Have Missed the Whole Point! (v20-23)

The reason for the exile – the reason for the devastation of Jerusalem – is precisely what you are doing right now! Sure, it's true, Jeremiah says – your fathers and your kings, and all the people of the land did what you are now doing. But this is the reason for God's judgment and curse against Jerusalem!

c. The Word of the LORD – Go Ahead, Fulfill Your Vows to the Queen of Heaven – Because the LORD Will Fulfill His Oath to Bring Disaster on You (v24-30)

Then confirm your vows and perform your vows! There are two words from the Lord in **verses 24-30**. The first is in **verses 24-25**. God says, Okay, fine. Go ahead and fulfill your vows – perform your vows – and make your offerings to the queen of heaven. You do what you have promised, and I will do what I have promised, and we'll see how it all works out!

You have vowed to continue offering to the queen of heaven. I have sworn by my great name that I will bring disaster on the men of Judah in Egypt. Those who escape the sword and famine will be few. And as a sign of this, I will give Pharaoh Hophra into the hand of his enemies. Pharaoh Hophra (Apries) was killed during a civil war in 570 B.C. So Jeremiah's final message to the people of Judah in Egypt is that God is against them and is seeking to destroy them. What are we supposed to do with this? Well, that's why **chapter 45** is here.

TEXT: Jeremiah 45:1-5

TITLE: CAUTION AGAINST SELFISH AMBITION IN THE MINISTRY

BIG IDEA:

DON'T SERVE GOD TO SEEK GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELF

INTRODUCTION:

First, we need to recognize that Baruch was a faithful servant of the Lord. His life was characterized by courage and hardship in remaining a partner to Jeremiah in bringing difficult words of judgment to a stubborn and unrepentant nation. But even a faithful minister of God's Word can be subject to times of discouragement. Here Baruch is impacted by the overwhelming sorrow of Judah's plight. But that sorrow is compounded by some degree of frustration over his unfulfilled personal ambitions. God needs to caution him against selfish ambition in the ministry and then reassure him that the mere preservation of his life in the midst of such challenging times of judgment should be viewed as a blessing in itself.

**DON'T SERVE GOD TO SEEK GREAT THINGS FOR YOURSELF
(RECOGNITION AND PERKS)**

I. (:1-3) BURNED UP AND BURNED OUT – LAMENT OF BARUCH

(:1-2) Introduction

“This is the message which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he had written down these words in a book at Jeremiah's dictation, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying: ‘Thus says the LORD the God of Israel to you, O Baruch:’”

Very personal message to Baruch

Guzik: Chronological order was not important to the one who arranged the Book of Jeremiah. The previous chapters in this section dealt with the time after the fall of Jerusalem and Judah. This chapter deals with a time many years before that catastrophe, something like a flashback in a film or novel.

Constable: It was wrong, therefore, for Baruch to expect a life of comfort and ease. Baruch was an educated man whose brother was a high official under King Zedekiah (**Jeremiah 51:59**). His grandfather had been the ruler of Jerusalem during Josiah's reign (cf. **Jeremiah 32:12; 2 Chronicles 34:8**). He may have entertained hopes of attaining a position of distinction in the nation, but Hebrews, too, would have to participate in the fallout of Yahweh's judgment. The Lord promised to bless Baruch by preserving his life wherever he went because of his faithful service.

A. (:3a) Burned Up -- Woe is Me – Emotionally Drained

“You said, ‘Ah, woe is me! For the LORD has added sorrow to my pain;’”

Baruch is ticked off – this ministry deal has not worked out the way he imagined; he is not being treated fairly for all of his faithful efforts

Adam Clarke: He had mourned for the desolations that were coming on his country, and now he mourns for the dangers to which he feels his own life exposed; for we find, from **Jeremiah 36:26**, that the king had given commandment to take both Baruch and Jeremiah, in order that they might be put to death at the instance of his nobles.

B. (:3b) Burned Out -- Weary am I -- Exhausted

“I am weary with my groaning and have found no rest.”

Baruch is ready to call it quits; no relief in sight

Thompson: It may be that as he dictated Jeremiah’s words of judgment, and knew in his heart that they were true and would certainly come to pass, he became depressed at it all and was filled with foreboding about his own future

II. (:4-5) CAUTIONED AND ENCOURAGED – LESSONS FROM THE LORD

(:4a) Introduction

“Thus you are to say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD,’”

Parunak: God does not encourage us to ignore the tragedy around us, but to persevere through it. Believers are not Pollyannas, always viewing the world through unnaturally rosey glasses. We see the evil in the world; indeed, we see it more acutely than does the unbeliever, because we see it in contrast with the perfect righteousness of Christ, and we know, as the unbeliever does not, that judgment is coming. The Lord does not take us out of the world, but he does deliver us from the evil one (**John 17:15**).

A. (:4b) Find Rest in the Sovereign Control of God

*“Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down,
and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land.”*

Make sure you are not seeking your treasure in the things of this world

B. (:5) Find Rest in God’s Protection – Not in Personal Recognition and Perks

1. Don’t Seek Personal Recognition or Perks

“‘But you, are you seeking great things for yourself? Do not seek them; for behold, I am going to bring disaster on all flesh,’ declares the LORD,”

Parunak: What does it mean, not to seek great things for oneself? **Ps. 131:1** associates it with a haughty heart and lofty eyes. Recall **Ecclesiastes**. Life is full of uncertainty and disappointment, so don’t set your hopes on high achievements, but be content with what you have, and enjoy God’s daily blessings. Cf. **Rom. 12:16**, this lack of ambition

will enable you to live in harmony with others, in a way that a grasping, striving spirit would make impossible.

Thompson: Baruch was an educated man, qualified as a secretary, whose brother (**Jeremiah 51:59**) was an officer of high rank under Zedekiah. He may have entertained hopes of some distinction in the nation. But whatever '*great things*' he sought for himself were forfeited by his loyal support of Jeremiah.

Constable: The Lord's command not to seek great things for himself presupposes a proud motive. Seeking to serve the Lord in a significant position of ministry is not wrong in itself, provided one's motive is to glorify God. It is seeking position for one's own glory that is wrong.

Wiersbe: The Lord cautioned him not to build his hopes on the future of Judah, because everything would be destroyed in the Babylonian siege. A "soft job" in the government would lead only to death or exile in Babylon.

Mackay: Living in a generation that is under the curse of God's judgment, his priorities are to be governed by the divine message rather than human hopes. His faith is not to be viewed as a step on the ladder of self-advancement; it is sufficient reward in itself.

2. Be Content with God's Protection Over Your Life

"but I will give your life to you as booty in all the places where you may go."

Adam Clarke: *But thy life will I give unto thee for a prey* - This is a proverbial expression. We have met with it before, **Jeremiah 21:9**, **Jeremiah 38:2**, **Jeremiah 39:18**; and it appears to have this meaning. As a prey or spoil is that which is gained from a vanquished enemy, so it is preserved with pleasure as the proof and reward of a man's own valor. So Baruch's life should be doubly precious unto him, not only on account of the dangers through which God had caused him to pass safely, but also on account of those services he had been enabled to render, the consolations he had received, and the continual and very evident interposition of God in his behalf. All these would be dearer to him than the spoils of a vanquished foe to the hero who had overcome in battle.

Spoil may signify unlooked-for gain. The preservation of his life, in such circumstances, must be more than he could reasonably expect; but his life should be safe, and he should have it as a spoil, whithersoever he should go. This assurance must have quieted all his fears.

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DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What types of discouragements get you down as you try to faithfully serve the Lord?
- 2) In what ways do you feel you have been overlooked or unrewarded for your service? How has this impacted you emotionally and physically?
- 3) How do you guard against despair when you see your biblical message rejected and judgment about to fall?
- 4) On what do you base your contentment?

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QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Ryken: It is obvious that when Baruch arranged Jeremiah's scroll he put this prophecy right where it belonged. He treasured the promise God gave him. It reminded him of the way God answered him in his despair. So he put it here at the end of his life to show that God was faithful to his promise.

Parunak: Conclusion

These examples of encouragement show us that encouragement must be

1. **personal**, delivered by one believer to another, not left to happen in devotions;
2. **biblical**, a word from God, not just pleasant thoughts;
3. **fitted** to the circumstances;
4. **sober**, in view of the circumstances of our world; pointing to God not as taking us out of the world, but as strengthening us in it

Adam Clarke: This chapter is evidently connected with the subject treated of in the thirty-sixth. Baruch, who had written the prophecies of Jeremiah, and read them publicly in the temple, and afterwards to many of the princes, is in great affliction because of the awful judgments with which the land of Judah was about to be visited; and also on account of the imminent danger to which his own life was exposed, in publishing such unwelcome tidings, **Jeremiah 45:1-3**. To remove Baruch's fear with respect to this latter circumstance, the prophet assures him that though the total destruction of Judea was determined because of the great wickedness of the inhabitants, yet his life should be preserved amidst the general desolation, **Jeremiah 45:4, Jeremiah 45:5**.

Dr. Craig Scott: Baruch – Growing Weary in Serving

It can be emotionally discouraging and sometimes crippling to go without hearing words of encouragement and receiving a reward. Some people get so discouraged they quit serving God. Even those who serve the Lord can go unrecognized, and when recognized they are criticized rather than rewarded.

This morning we are going to look at a man named Baruch. He was a significant player in world politics during the final days of the nation of Judah. He was also a vital component in spiritual affairs of Israel.

He is a silent unsung hero who worked tirelessly for Jeremiah behind the scenes and sometimes in the forefront delivering God's message to the nation. . .

The root of his discouragement arose from his secret desire to receive praise now, rather than patiently wait for the appropriate time when the Lord would richly bless him for his work well done. His wrong expectations caused him to take his sights off the Lord. It resulted in him being paralyzed in his faithful service. . .

Baruch in Hebrew means, *blessing*, or blessed. He was a godly man; a well-educated scribe; a biblical lawyer, and an authority on the word of God. His family was politically connected and most likely well to do. His brother was a high-ranking officer to one of the Kings of Judah. He was the personal scribe and loyal associate to the prophet Jeremiah.

He faithfully ministered with Jeremiah for over two decades and suffered many of the same hardships that faced Jeremiah. He literally recorded the messages of Jeremiah and compiled the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. . .

His grief was the burden of running and hiding; the hatred and ridicule. Shouldn't the man of God be honored? Shouldn't more people appreciate the sacrifices he made? When Baruch got into the business of serving the Lord he expected great things. . .

James Barker: THE LORD'S MESSAGE TO BARUCH **INTRODUCTION:**

1. The book of Jeremiah is not in strict chronological order. Chronologically, chapter 45 follows chapter 36 (cf. 45:1).

2. This prophecy recorded in Jeremiah chapter 45 was given during the reign of King Jehoiakim (45:1).

3. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says Baruch "seems to have been of noble family. He was also according to Josephus a man of unusual acquirements. He might have risen to a high position and seemed conscious of this, but under Jeremiah's influence (see Jer. 45:5) he repressed his ambition, being content to throw in his lot with the great prophet whose secretary and companion he became. Jeremiah dictated his prophecies to Baruch, who read them to the people (Jer. 36). The king (Jehoiakim) was greatly angered at these prophecies and had Baruch arrested and the roll burnt. Baruch however rewrote the prophet's oracles. In the final siege of Jerusalem Baruch stood by his master, witnessing the purchase by the latter of his ancestral estate in Anathoth (Jer. 32). According to Josephus, he continued to reside with Jeremiah at Mizpah after the fall of Jerusalem. Subsequent to the murder of Gedaliah, he was accused of having unduly influenced Jeremiah when the latter urged the people to remain in Judah--a fact

which shows how great was the influence which Baruch was believed to have had over his master (Jer. 43:3). He was carried with Jeremiah to Egypt (Jer. 43:6), and thereafter our knowledge of him is merely legendary. According to a tradition preserved by Jerome he died in Egypt soon after reaching that country."

4. Jeremiah is known as "the weeping prophet" because his heart was broken over the unrepentant and stubborn unbelief of his countrymen. He also saw the coming judgment and grieved over what was in store for Jerusalem and the rest of Judah.

5. Jeremiah warned them repeatedly to repent of their idolatry, but they refused to listen. Their wickedness also affected Baruch, and we see here in Jeremiah 45 that their behaviour made him discouraged and depressed.

I. BARUCH'S DISCOURAGEMENT AND DEPRESSION

1. Jeremiah chapter 44 ends with Jeremiah and Baruch, and the rest of the remnant in Egypt. This chapter, and the following chapters are placed here at the end of Jeremiah's story as a supplementary section, or an appendix.

2. The Scofield Bible describes Jeremiah 45--52 as, "Miscellaneous Prophecies." Jeremiah's narrative ends with chapter 44.

3. Chapter 52 is similar to chapter 39. These chapters describe the overthrow of Jerusalem. The book of Jeremiah concludes with a brief description of the last days of King Jehoiachin, who died in Babylon.

4. Baruch was Jeremiah's secretary or scribe. To him Jeremiah dictated his prophecies. The effect of writing these lengthy prophecies of judgment and doom was depressing to Baruch (cf. 45:2, 3).

5. Merrill Unger said, "His depression grew to despondency, since the occasional predictions of peace and salvation were reserved for the distant future. Moreover, the public reading of the scroll and its hostile reception, especially by the king, did not help matters. Baruch realized that in his lifetime he could only look for hardship and persecution" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

6. The Jews considered Jeremiah a traitor for telling them to yield to Babylon, and they also distrusted Baruch (cf. 36:17).

7. In Jeremiah 43:3, the Jews in Egypt accused Jeremiah the prophet of being misled by Baruch. All of this pressure caused great grief and unrest for Baruch (45:2, 3).

8. Unger said Baruch "was put in the exceedingly unpopular light of being pro-Babylonian and an abettor of Jeremiah" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

II. THE LORD ENCOURAGED BARUCH

1. The LORD told Jeremiah to speak to Baruch (45:1-3).

2. Irving L. Jensen summarized the message:

- (1) Acknowledge God's sovereign will concerning judgment (45:4).
- (2) Baruch was not to selfishly seek great things for himself (45:5a).
- (3) Baruch was to be one of the few whom God would spare when Jerusalem was overthrown (45:5b).

3. There was no need for Baruch to be sorrowful. The LORD was in control. He gave Judah plenty of time to repent. Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Kings Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah.

4. But the people of Judah, especially their wicked kings Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, would not repent. Therefore the LORD had to break down that which He had built.

5. He had to pluck up that which He had planted (45:4).

6. Merrill Unger said the LORD had to remind Baruch that the LORD'S sorrow vastly exceeded his own, "for He was demolishing His own construction; how, then, could Baruch seek his own individual well-being?" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

7. Jerusalem was engulfed in ruin. It would be unwise for Baruch to seek great things for himself (45:5).

8. But the LORD promised to spare his life. The LORD would give Baruch for a "prey" (spoil, booty) in all places wherever he went. The Bible does not tell us where Baruch went, and this is the last mention of him in Scripture. A tradition preserved by Jerome says he died in Egypt.

9. Another tradition states that he later went, or was carried, to Babylon, after the Babylonians conquered Egypt. This tradition seems to line up with Jeremiah 45:5b -- "but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goest."

10. However, this prophecy was given to Baruch "in the fourth year of Jehoiakim" (45:1), i.e., before the destruction of Jerusalem, before the Babylonian captivity, and before Baruch was brought to Egypt with Jeremiah and the others.

11. The LORD was telling Baruch that things were bad (King Jehoiakim had just cut scroll containing the Word of God with his penknife and threw it in the fire), but they would get much worse.

12. The LORD was telling Baruch that no matter what happened, or no matter where he went, the LORD would preserve him. Of course, the same could be said for the prophet Jeremiah.

13. And the same could be said for the Jewish people. Jeremiah 31:31 says, "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

14. Jeremiah, along with Isaiah and the other Old Testament prophets prophesied about the future restoration of Israel (cf. 31:35-37).

CONCLUSION:

1. Baruch was a faithful assistant to the prophet Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah has with 52 chapters, but most people are not familiar with Baruch even though he recorded those 52 chapters.

2. Jeremiah is mentioned over 100 times in Scripture, but Baruch is only mentioned a few times, mostly in Jeremiah 36 and 45.

3. Jeremiah is mentioned in Matthew 16:14, where in response to our Lord's question, "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?" His apostles said, "Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets."

4. It is a great honor for a prophet to be compared to the Lord Jesus Christ. Baruch is not honored in that way. Yet he was a faithful man of God, who worked closely for many years with the prophet Jeremiah.

5. I have preached many times about Barnabas, who is overshadowed in the book of Acts by the great apostle Paul.

6. Spurgeon said, "It takes more grace than I can tell to play the second fiddle well."

7. Baruch was overshadowed by the prophet Jeremiah, but he was greatly used of God and received his heavenly reward.

Dr. Wayne Mack: Great Things for Yourself?

Now there wasn't anything wrong with what Baruch wanted. He wanted revival, he wanted the people to turn back to God, he wanted the people to listen to God's word, and obey God's word. So there wasn't anything wrong with what he wanted, but there was something very wrong with the reason for which he wanted it. He wanted them to turn to God for himself. He wanted the people to respond because that would mean something about him as a person. He wanted to be a great preacher. He wasn't satisfied with being the assistant pastor of Jeremiah. Where Jeremiah would get the credit, no, he wanted the credit to be given to him, and God knew that, and so He said, "Seek them not. Don't seek glory, for great things for yourself." . . .

And dear ones, I submit to you, there isn't a person here today who is qualified to throw stones at Baruch because there is probably not a person here today who is not guilty of seeking the right thing for wrong reasons. Seeking for themselves, and not ultimately, all we can say with our lips, "We're doing this for the glory of God," but many times

what we are concerned about is the glory of self. Sometimes we can be doing what appears to be Kingdom of God work, while in reality we are doing kingdom of self work, and that is what was true with Baruch. He was doing the right thing, but he was doing it for the wrong reason. He was doing it for the glory of Baruch, and God came and rebuked him for that. . .

3 Reasons our focus should be on living for God's glory:

- 1) And what He's saying here is that He's going to bring judgment, and He's the one who decides when judgment should come.
- 2) The second thing that he said to Baruch is, "*I will give your life to you,*" and He's reminding him that God is the one who gives life, and that life is a gift from God.
- 3) So the third reason why we should not seek great things for ourselves, we should not focus on self, is because God is the one who will protect us.

TEXT: Jeremiah 46:1-28

TITLE: ORACLE AGAINST EGYPT

BIG IDEA:

GOD CONTROLS THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE POWERFUL NATION OF EGYPT

INTRODUCTION:

Jeremiah serves not only as a prophet to the nation of Judah, but as God's messenger to declare His sovereignty over the affairs of all nations. Here we begin the final section of the Book of Jeremiah which contains specific oracles against the nations of Jeremiah's day. We begin with an oracle against the powerful nation of Egypt. These messages have implications of warning of impending judgment for these pagan nations which trusted in worthless idols as well as words of assurance to God's own people regarding the ultimate fulfillment of all of the covenant related promises. It would certainly be futile for the Jews to turn to Egypt for refuge and security. But God's people also should not despair about the divine promises of their future restoration and blessing. God can use pagan kings as the instruments of His divine agenda. He is ultimately in control of the highest powers operating on the earth. *"Some trust in horses and some in chariots. But we will remember the name of the Lord our God."*

GOD CONTROLS THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE POWERFUL NATION OF EGYPT

(:1) PROLOGUE TO FINAL CHAPTERS = ORACLES TO THE NATIONS

"That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations."

MacArthur: Jeremiah had already proclaimed that all the nations at some time are to "drink the cup" of God's wrath (25:15-26).

I. (:2-12) DEFEAT OF EGYPT AT CARCHEMISH – SHIFT IN BALANCE OF POWER

(:2) Introduction

"To Egypt, concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was by the Euphrates River at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah:"

Kidner: The name of Carchemish (2) introduces us to one of the decisive battles of world history, fought in 605 BC (*the fourth year of Jehoiakim, 2*). Seven years earlier, in 612, the great Assyrian empire had had its death blow in the destruction of its capital, Nineveh, leaving the powers of east and west to fight it out for the succession. On the route between Babylon and Egypt, Carchemish (*in the north by the river Euphrates, 6b*)

made the natural confrontation point; and it was on his way there that Pharaoh Neco had slain King Josiah of Judah in 609 when Josiah tried to turn him back. For the next four years the Egyptian army was based on Carchemish, and Pharaoh dominated Syria and Palestine, setting up his puppet-kings while Babylon's main force was preoccupied elsewhere. Then at last the Babylonian army fell upon the Egyptians in 605, routing them utterly

A. (:3-4) Final Preparations for Battle – Give it Your Best Shot

*“Line up the shield and buckler, and draw near for the battle!
Harness the horses, and mount the steeds, and take your stand with helmets on!
Polish the spears, Put on the scale-armor!”*

Thompson: The poetry is among the most vivid in all the OT and is certainly unsurpassed in the book of Jeremiah.

Longman: The form of **verses 3-12** is that of an event-vision that anticipates a future event.

Mackay: The small shield, which is mentioned first, hence the order *“buckler and shield”* (NKJV), would have been held in the left hand, and carvings suggest it was round and used principally to protect the head. It probably consisted of leather stretched across a wooden frame, and was oiled to help parry blows (**2 Sam. 1:21; Isa. 21:5**). The larger shield would have been either oval or rectangular in shape and used to protect the whole body. When advancing into battle such shields would have been used to form a moving barrier capable of deflecting enemy missiles from the soldiers, most of whom did not wear body armour.

B. (:5-6) Futility of Fighting God

1. (:5) Devastating Panic

*“Why have I seen it? They are terrified,
They are drawing back, and their mighty men are defeated
And have taken refuge in flight, without facing back;
‘Terror is on every side!’ declares the LORD.”*

2. (:6) Debilitating Negation of Power

*“Let not the swift man flee, nor the mighty man escape;
In the north beside the river Euphrates they have stumbled and fallen.”*

Parunak: As a result of the terror that the Lord sends among the Egyptians and the hindrances he puts before their flight, we see the final outcome: the Egyptian army has fallen on the banks of the Euphrates.

C. (:7-8) False Bravado

1. (:7) Strength in Numbers

*“Who is this that rises like the Nile,
Like the rivers whose waters surge about?”*

2. (:8) Arrogant Claims

*Egypt rises like the Nile,
Even like the rivers whose waters surge about;
And He has said, 'I will rise and cover that land;
I will surely destroy the city and its inhabitants.'"*

Wiersbe: When the Egyptian army approached the battlefield, they looked like the Nile in flood season. The military leaders were sure of victory, and their mercenaries were eager to fight (v. 9), but the Lord had determined that Egypt would lose the battle.

D. (:9-10) Futility of Fighting God

1. (:9) Reinforcements Summoned

*"Go up, you horses, and drive madly, you chariots,
That the mighty men may march forward:
Ethiopia and Put, that handle the shield,
And the Lydians, that handle and bend the bow."*

2. (:10) Vengeance Executed by God

*"For that day belongs to the Lord GOD of hosts,
A day of vengeance, so as to avenge Himself on His foes;
And the sword will devour and be satiated
And drink its fill of their blood;
For there will be a slaughter for the Lord GOD of hosts,
In the land of the north by the river Euphrates."*

Mackay: Though the Egyptian army commanders urge on all the men under them, it will be to no avail. Neither the preparations of vv. 3-4 nor the reinforcements that are brought forward in v. 9 will deflect disaster.

E. (:11-12) Final Demise

1. (:11) No Healing Possible

*"Go up to Gilead and obtain balm,
O virgin daughter of Egypt!
In vain have you multiplied remedies;
there is no healing for you."*

Mackay: The defeated Egyptians are taunted because there is nothing they can do to remedy their situation.

2. (:12) No Escape From Shame and Distress

*"The nations have heard of your shame,
and the earth is full of your cry of distress;
For one warrior has stumbled over another,
and both of them have fallen down together."*

Feinberg: Somewhat in the manner of a taunt song, Jeremiah advises Egypt to seek a remedy for her wounds (v. 11). Her defeat dealt her an irrecoverable blow; she could not heal herself. Not only was Gilead noted for its healing balm (cf. 8:22), but Homer spoke of Egypt as full of physicians. From antiquity she was famous for her medical arts (cf. Pliny). It was from Egypt and India that the knowledge of medicine came to Europe (cf. Herod. 2.116). The defeat will be publicized among the nations (v. 12). In their rout, the warriors will get in each other's way.

Parunak: Application: Judah had the benefit of this prophecy in the fourth year of J'kim. Yet they continued to seek the help and protection of Egypt against Neb; they would not accept that it was the Lord who had defeated Egypt, and who could protect them. So we need to see the hand of the Lord behind all that happens in the world, and look to him alone for protection and help.

Mackay: Egypt's power has not brought her the victory she expected because she did not really identify who her foe was: not Babylon, but the Lord who is directing the affairs of the nations to suit his own purposes.

II. (:13-24) SUBSEQUENT CONQUEST OF EGYPT BY NEBUCHADNEZZAR

MacArthur: Babylon's invasion of Egypt, 15 or 16 years before the destruction of Jerusalem, is here detailed (601 B.C.; cf. v. 13). Having spent 13 years in a siege of Tyre, Nebuchadnezzar was promised Egypt as a reward for humbling Tyre (cf. Eze 29:17-20).

A. (:13-14) Final Preparations for Battle

1. (:13) Introduction

"This is the message which the LORD spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to smite the land of Egypt:"

2. (:14) Take Your Stand

*"Declare in Egypt and proclaim in Migdol,
Proclaim also in Memphis and Tahpanhes;
Say, 'Take your stand and get yourself ready,
For the sword has devoured those around you.'"*

Kidner: The place-names in **verse 14** are of the frontier towns in the path of an invader from the north-east, together with Memphis the capital of Lower (i.e. northern) Egypt. But the call to make a stand there only emphasizes how frail is her defence, with evidently her boasted mercenaries of **verse 9** (cf. v. 21) melting away to their own people and their homelands (16).

B. (:15-16) Futility of Fighting God

1. (:15) Struck Down

*“Why have your mighty ones become prostrate?
They do not stand because the LORD has thrust them down.”*

Mackay: Following the LXX, the NRSV and the REB take the reference in “warriors” to be to the bull-god, possibly using a plural of majesty. “Why has Apis fled? Why did your bull not stand?” Apis was the bull-god worshipped at Memphis, and revered as the son of, or an aspect, of, the god Ptah. Since images of deity were carried into battle, and the flight or capture of such an image would be interpreted as the defeat of those worshipping that particular god, it is possible that Nebuchadnezzar’s success is being portrayed as the vanquishing of a prominent Egyptian god. The bull has fled.

2. (:16) Retreating

*“They have repeatedly stumbled;
Indeed, they have fallen one against another.
Then they said, ‘Get up! And let us go back
To our own people and our native land
Away from the sword of the oppressor.’”*

C. (:17-18) Divine Decree

1. (:17) Impotence of Human Kings

*“They cried there, ‘Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a big noise;
He has let the appointed time pass by!’”*

2. (:18) Sovereignty of God Over All Nations

*“‘As I live,’ declares the King
Whose name is the LORD of hosts,
‘Surely one shall come who looms up like Tabor among the mountains,
Or like Carmel by the sea.’”*

Mackay: The true source of direction and authority does not lie with any Pharaoh – god though he claimed to be – but with the Lord of hosts, in whose control lie the forces of heaven and earth. He declares what is going to happen, that is, what he is going to bring about, and guarantees the accuracy and truthfulness of what he says with a solemn oath.

D. (:19-22) 4 Images of Defeat

1. (:19) Imagery of Burned and Uninhabitable Territory

*“Make your baggage ready for exile,
O daughter dwelling in Egypt,
For Memphis will become a desolation;
It will even be burned down and bereft of inhabitants.”*

2. (:20) Imagery of Stinging Horsefly Attacking Pretty Heifer

*“Egypt is a pretty heifer,
But a horsefly is coming from the north—it is coming!”*

3. (:21) Imagery of Slaughtered Calves

*“Also her mercenaries in her midst
Are like fattened calves,
For even they too have turned back and have fled away together;
They did not stand their ground.
For the day of their calamity has come upon them,
The time of their punishment.”*

4. (:22) Imagery of Frightened Serpents

*“Its sound moves along like a serpent;
For they move on like an army
And come to her as woodcutters with axes.”*

Mackay: The picture seems to be one of a serpent that has been disturbed in its lair in the undergrowth as foresters come to fell trees. It then slithers away in helpless retreat. The imagery would have been suggested by the extensive use of the coiled serpent as a symbol of divine power in Egypt, probably to represent Pharaoh’s ability to strike in deadly fashion against all that dared to oppose him. But now he is just a disturbed and frightened snake slithering away.

E. (:23-24) Final Demise

1. (:23) Devastation

*“‘They have cut down her forest,’ declares the LORD;
‘Surely it will no more be found,
Even though they are now more numerous than locusts
And are without number.’”*

2. (:24) Shame and Bondage

*“The daughter of Egypt has been put to shame,
Given over to the power of the people of the north.”*

Thompson: The reference is possibly to her exposure as she was delivered into the hands of a people from the north. It was an exposure that Jeremiah had witnessed when Jerusalem fell and the girls and women became objects to satisfy the lust of the Babylonian troops.

III. (:25-28) FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

A. (:25-26) Egypt’s Future

1. (:25) Divine Punishment

*“The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, says, ‘Behold, I am going to
punish Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh, and Egypt along with her gods
and her kings, even Pharaoh and those who trust in him.’”*

Ryken: God’s victory over the Egyptians was also a defeat of their so-called gods. The one true God has no rivals. This shows the folly of trusting the gods and generals of

Egypt, as the Jews were tempted to do. There is only one God and Judge of all nations.

2. (:26a) Divine Agent

“I shall give them over to the power of those who are seeking their lives, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of his officers.”

3. (:26b) Divine Mercy

“Afterwards, however, it will be inhabited as in the days of old,” declares the LORD.”

B. (:27-28) Judah’s Future

1. (:27) Divine Rescue

*“But as for you, O Jacob My servant, do not fear,
Nor be dismayed, O Israel!
For, see, I am going to save you from afar,
And your descendants from the land of their captivity;
And Jacob will return and be undisturbed
And secure, with no one making him tremble.”*

Wiersbe: They shouldn’t have been there, but a band of Jews was in Egypt, and this invasion would affect them terribly. The remnant in Judah and the exiles in Babylon would hear of this victory and wonder whether anything on earth could stop Nebuchadnezzar. God had promised that the exiles would be released from Babylon in seventy years, but Babylon looked stronger than ever.

2. (:28a) Divine Retribution

*“O Jacob My servant, do not fear,’ declares the LORD,
‘For I am with you. For I will make a full end of all the nations
Where I have driven you,”*

3. (:28b) Divine Remnant

*“Yet I will not make a full end of you;
But I will correct you properly
And by no means leave you unpunished.”*

Kidner: to remind an Israel now under a cloud that if there is a future for even Egypt after its ordeal (**26b**), how much more can God’s covenant people be certain of his fairness (*in just measure*, 28b), and of the grace that he delights in.

Mackay: They are again reminded that the overwhelming political realities of the day are under divine control and will not be permitted to frustrate what the Lord has in view for his people.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What is the significance of Jeremiah proclaiming oracles against the surrounding pagan nations?
- 2) How does God present himself as sovereign over all the nations in contrast to the various localized types of gods worshiped by other nations?
- 3) Who is ultimately behind this victory of Nebuchadnezzar over the great military power of Egypt?
- 4) Why should God's people not lose hope in the midst of chaotic international turmoil?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Longman: The oracles begin with the westernmost nation (Egypt), move to those in the near vicinity of Israel (Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom), and finally to those toward the east (Damascus, Arabia, Elam, Babylon).

Mackay: There are two main sections to the prophecies given against Egypt. **Verses 2-12** relates to the situation in 605 BC, whereas **vv. 13-28** come from a less well-defined period and end with two appendices (**vv. 25-26** and **vv. 27-28**) to the main material, in the first of which there is a positive note sounded regarding Egypt's future, and in the second a prediction regarding the survival of the people of God which contains at least an element of hope. The oracle can therefore be viewed at various levels. When originally given, it was a word of hope for Judah that Egypt would not triumph, and therefore also a word of warning against trusting in Egyptian power. In later years when Jeremiah formed this collection it continued to speak of the Lord's power and his ordering of the affairs of the nations to further his purposes. This is especially true with the final sections which point to the salvation he would give.

Ryken: The prophet vividly foretold what the battle of Carchemish would be like for Egypt. That battle, which took place in 605 B.C., marked a major turning point in world history. The Babylonian victory shifted the balance of power from the Nile to the Euphrates. Just four years later (601 B.C.), the Babylonians marched on Egypt (**v. 13ff**).

Parunak: Structure of the oracles against Egypt: Three main sections:

- a) **2-12** describes Egypt's abortive attack on Babylon at Carchemish, 609-605 BC. Originally delivered under Jehoiakim.

Lesson: Don't look to Egypt for deliverance.

b) **13-24** describes Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt, 586 BC, the subject also of **ch. 43**.

Lesson: Don't flee to Egypt.

c) **25-28** promises the restoration both of Egypt and of Judah.

Lesson: The God who chastises is the same one who is able to restore. Trust in him.

Summary:

1. The basic lesson of these oracles, that God in chastening his people does not overlook the sins of the pagans, is emphasized by drawing from the oracles against Judah to describe Egypt's fate:

a) **5** "*Why do I see . . .*", **30:6**

b) **5** "*Terror round about*," **Ps. 34:13** and numerous citations in Jer

c) **11** "*balm of Gilead*," cf. **8:33**

d) **11** ineffective medical help; "*no healing*," **30:13**

e) **11, 19, 24**, "*daughter of Egypt*," cf. the frequent title "*daughter of Zion*" used to describe Judah in her desolation.

2.. "*The most High rules . . . among the inhabitants of the earth*," **Dan. 3**. The political fortunes of nations are the outworking of his sovereign pleasure.

3. Finally, he promises blessing to his chosen ones. Ultimately, we will rejoice forever in heaven – and until then, in this present evil world, we have the assurance of his loving presence with us, and his guarantee that though for our good he may permit us to suffer, he will never let it get out of control.

Peter Wallace: Politics and the Kingdom of God I: Nations, Know Your Limits

In one sense it is proper to be angry about injustice – and it is right to plead with God to bring vengeance. After all, God says, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay." But there also comes a point when you are grieved to the heart at the slaughter and bloodshed, and you just cry out, **6** *Ah, sword of the LORD! How long till you are quiet? Put yourself into your scabbard; rest and be still!* Jeremiah is speaking about the Philistines. These are the enemies of God's people – and have been for hundreds of years! But even as God himself does not delight in the death of the wicked, so also we may grow weary of the violence and death.

I have long maintained the practice of preaching through books of the Bible, resisting the temptation to use the pulpit as my own platform for my opinions. Hot button topics will come and go – but the Word of God endures forever. What we need most of all is not to hear what Pastor Peter thinks about modern politics – what we need most of all is to hear what God says to all generations. But every once in a while, the text for a given Sunday happens to line up neatly with what is happening in our society. And so for the next few weeks we will be looking at what Jeremiah says about "Politics and the Kingdom of God." So far in Jeremiah we have focused mostly on Jeremiah's message to the church – the people of God. But now we hear Jeremiah's message concerning the

nations. Now, it's important to recognize that Jeremiah is not actually speaking to the nations. He is still speaking to the church – to the people of God. But he is speaking to the people of God about the nations. How should we think about the political world around us? How should we think about the powers of this age? And **verse 1 of chapter 46** makes this clear:

Introduction: “Concerning the Nations” (46:1)

God had told Baruch that he was bringing disaster on all flesh. Not just Jerusalem – not just the Jews – but upon all humanity. Therefore the oracles concerning the nations fits well in this place. In the Babylonian text (which we have) the oracles against the nations appear as a Postscript to Jeremiah's prophecies regarding Jerusalem. In one sense, it feels like the book of Jeremiah is over. And now we get these seven chapters of oracles against the nations. But in the Babylonian text of Jeremiah, this postscript is designed to show us that God's purposes are broader than just Jerusalem. Yes, salvation will come through Jerusalem – but Yahweh is God over all nations!

On the other hand, in the Alexandrian text (used in the Eastern Orthodox Church) the oracles against the nations are inserted in the middle of **chapter 25**. So, just for a moment, turn back to **chapter 25**. **Chapter 25** speaks of the fourth year of Jehoiaquim – the first year of Nebuchadnezzar – and says that God will give Jerusalem over to Nebuchadnezzar, and Jerusalem will become a ruin and a waste, and these nations will serve Babylon for seventy years. Then after seventy years, God will punish Babylon and restore his people.

Chapter 25, verse 13 says: *“I will bring upon that land [Babylon] all the words that I have uttered against it, everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations.”* And then, the Alexandrian text inserts what we call chapters 46-51. And then after the oracles concerning the nations, the Alexandrian text comes back to the cup of wrath (25:15ff). That's a really good spot for the Oracles against the Nations. But, then again, so is this!

It's also the case that the two texts put the oracles in different order. In the LXX, the order is Elam, Egypt, Babylon, Philistines, Edom, Ammon, Kedar, Damascus and Moab; In the MT, the order is Egypt, Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar, Elam, and Babylon. If you end the book with **chapter 45** – like the Alexandrian manuscript does, then the point to the Alexandrian exiles is you are all going to die! (Except those few who repent and trust the LORD like Baruch and Ebed-Melech) But in the Babylonian manuscript, the focus is not on the Egyptian exiles, but on God's purposes for all of history – and for all nations. The judgment of the nations begins with Egypt – and ends with Babylon.

Why is this important? This takes the same pattern as the history of Israel. From slavery in Egypt to exile in Babylon. (and in the middle, Israel skirmished with the Philistines, the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Syrians, etc.) And that's why it is fitting that in the Babylonian text the oracles begin with Egypt.

1. Regarding Egypt (46:2-28)

a. The Battle of Carchemish: The Pride of Nations Will Be Vanquished (v2-12)

i. “Terror on Every Side” – Egypt Defeated (v2-6)

The battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. (the 4th year of Jehoiakim) was the final step in the ascendancy of Babylon. The Neo-Babylonian empire had been rising for a generation. The Assyrians had been pushed back step by step. The Egyptians (who had long been opposed to Assyria) were now Assyrian allies, because they preferred the enemy they knew (Assyria) to the enemy they didn't know (Babylon). Assyria was weak. They needed Egypt's help – and Egypt knew it. And so Pharaoh Neco of Egypt took his army up to the Euphrates River – to Carchemish – where he battled Nebuchadnezzar – and lost.

The description of the battle in **verses 3-5** is pretty generic. Get ready for battle! But then in verse 5, everything turns against them – *“Their warriors are beaten down and have fled in haste; they look not back – terror on every side! declares the LORD”* And in keeping with what we know about the battle – the Babylonians pursued and effectively destroyed the Egyptian army: 6 *“The swift cannot flee away, nor the warrior escape; in the north by the river Euphrates they have stumbled and fallen.”*

Then in **verses 7-9**, Jeremiah provides the explanation for Egypt's fall:

ii. Pride Goes Before a Fall (v7-9)

The flooding of the Nile is what makes the land of Egypt fertile. If it wasn't for the annual inundation of the Nile, Egypt would be a desert. That is what God intended for the Nile River. But what would happen if the Nile River decided to flood the whole world?! *“I will rise, I will cover the earth, I will destroy cities and their inhabitants.”*

When nations seek to expand their own bounds – when nations seek their own glory at the expense of other nations – they are setting themselves up for destruction. What is God's rule for the nations? When you look at the oracles against the nations in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos, one common feature is something very like the golden rule. *“Do unto others as you would have them do to you.”* If Egypt tries to rule the world, then the world will overrun Egypt.

Paul says in **Acts 17:26-27**, that God *“made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him.”* That's not merely descriptive. God has appointed boundaries for every nation. When nations overstep their boundaries, they are storing up wrath for themselves.

Let me give an easy example. In 1846, the United States started a war with Mexico because Mexico wouldn't sell a large percentage of its land to the US. Most of the US territories were in the northwest – designated by the Missouri Compromise of 1820 as free soil – not open to slavery. Southerners wanted more slave states – but the southwest belonged to Mexico – so the United States started a war in order to add slave

states. A large number of Christians in the US protested against the Mexican War. Many recognized that it was entirely unjust. But sometimes the wicked prosper. Sometimes it takes time for judgment to fall. The Mexican War worked. The United States added the Southwest from Texas to California – but in so doing, the US stored up an extra measure of wrath, which was meted out fifteen years later in the Civil War. (More Americans died in the Civil War than in all other wars combined) I have no difficulty saying that the death and destruction of the Civil War was due – at least in part – to America’s national, corporate sins. The Mexican War, slavery, our nation’s treatment of Indians, and many other sins all combined to warrant God’s mighty hand smiting the United States in 1860. It’s important to be careful in a providential reading of history. We don’t know in advance how long God will give.

In **chapter 25**, we were told that God would give Babylon 70 years. After the Mexican War, he gave the US less than fifteen years. But it’s not clear to me that the US ever “repented” – as our subsequent treatment of blacks, Indians, and Mexicans demonstrates! So, if God will judge the nations for expanding beyond their borders – how can a nation know its limits? Again, the Golden Rule is a good test! If you wouldn’t want another nation to do it to you, then don’t do it to another nation! If you don’t like Saddam Hussein, and you think that someone else who would do better, only seek regime change if you wouldn’t mind another country doing the same to us if they don’t like our president! God did not give George W. Bush rule over Iraq. He gave him rule over the United States. Can you imagine a world in which the United States is not the power-broker among the nations?

In the same way, the Egyptians could not imagine a world in which Egypt did not have a say in the affairs of the middle-east. But when nations overstep their bounds – when nations pursue their own self-interest rather than the Golden Rule – then will come the day of the Lord GOD of Hosts.

iii. The Day of the LORD – a Day of Vengeance (v10-12)

Vengeance is a good thing – when God does it! It’s not so good when we do it! The story is told of a young monk in the desert who went to his advisor and told him how he had been wronged, and how he intended to make things right by getting revenge on the man who had wronged him. The older monk said, “Indeed, let us pray: ‘Ah Lord God, we don’t need you for this one, we can take vengeance for ourselves. Amen.’” Immediately the younger monk recognized his fault! Our anger can accomplish nothing good! The wrath of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God! Vengeance belongs to the LORD. And we need to be patient and allow him to do his mighty deeds. Otherwise, yes, we may become the instrument of God in bringing justice to the wicked. (I have no difficulty saying that Saddam Hussein deserved to be overthrown – and George W. Bush served as God’s agent in bringing vengeance! But in so doing, the United States once again overstepped our boundaries, and stored up another measure of vengeance against us!)

There are two images used in **verses 10-12**. First, in **verse 10**, there is the image of the Day of the Lord GOD of hosts – where the sword devours and drinks its fill of blood –

which is called “*a sacrifice...by the river Euphrates.*” What does it mean that the Battle of Carchemish is a “sacrifice”? Think about the way Hebrews says it: “*without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins.*” (**Heb 9:22**) Sin demands a blood sacrifice. The wages of sin is death. So either you die – or someone dies in your place.

The second image in **verses 11-12** is the image of healing – or balm. There is no medicine that can cure Egypt. There is no nation that can rescue her. There is a balm in Gilead – on the east side of the Jordan in Israel. But of course, since Nebuchadnezzar has swept through Israel, there nothing left. The nations have heard of your shame. All the greatness of Egypt is now cast down. Never think that the United States to “too big to fail.” And that is the theme of part two – a message that would appear to come from around the time of Jeremiah’s arrival in Egypt. (since **verse 14** refers to the same places where the refugees settled).

b. The Coming of Nebuchadnezzar: The Fate of Nations and Their Gods (v13- 28)

i. The Nations Are Noisy – But Powerless (v13-17)

Yes, in one sense it is Nebuchadnezzar who comes against Egypt. But **verse 15** points out that before Nebuchadnezzar’s army arrives, the mighty ones of Egypt are face down – because the LORD thrust them down. This brings back memories of how the ark of the LORD went before Israel into the temple of Dagon – the Philistine god – and how the LORD cast down Dagon before the ark of the covenant. The gods of Egypt cannot stand against the LORD. Therefore the armies of Egypt cannot stand against Babylon. And so the armies flee back to Egypt because of the “*sword of the oppressor*” and the LORD gives Pharaoh Hophra a new name. The Egyptian name of Hophra is Haabire. The Hebrew for “lets go by” is he’ebir. So call the name of Pharaoh – “Noisy one who lets the hour go by.” He’s all talk. When the hour comes, he will do nothing.

ii. The Fate of Egypt: the Heifer and the Serpent (v18-26)

In **verses 18-19**, Jeremiah says that the people of Egypt should prepare themselves for exile – for Memphis shall become a waste, a ruin, without inhabitant. And then in **verses 20-21**, Jeremiah compares Egypt to a “*beautiful heifer*” – a cow plagued by a biting fly – a gadfly from the north.

The heifer tries to escape – making a sound like a serpent (which is one of the traditional images of Egypt – the sea monster lying in the waters of the Nile!) but her enemies will do to her what they did to Jerusalem – felling trees – cutting down her forests – like a plague of locusts from the north. (read **25-26**) God is against Egypt! God will do to Egypt what he did to Jerusalem. Remember that Jeremiah is not actually talking to Egyptians. He is speaking to Israel. Those who dwell in Egypt had been pro-Egyptian. They had hoped that Egypt would defend them from Babylon. But Egypt has failed – and now Egypt will be destroyed.

The end of **verse 26** provides only the faintest of hope to Egypt – but that is because Jeremiah is not really talking to Egypt! And even as he says this to Israel, the LORD has a word to Israel as well:

iii. A Promise to Jacob, My Servant (v27-28)

Verses 27-28 function as something of an awkward addendum to the oracle against Egypt. It has nothing to do with Egypt at all! Indeed, there is nothing here that would give particular hope to the refugees in Egypt. *"I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity"* probably refers to those in exile in Babylon. Is there a future for the Egyptian refugees? Perhaps. God says that he will not make a full end of his people. *"I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished."* As we consider the coming wrath of God against the nations, we are reminded that judgment begins with the household of God (**1 Peter 4**), and if it begins with us, what will happen to those who do not obey the gospel of God? There is a future for the people of God. Therefore repent and believe the gospel!

James Barker: Prophecy Against Egypt

INTRODUCTION:

1. This new section, from Jeremiah chapters 46 through 51 deal with God's judgments upon the Gentile nations (46:1). Way back in chapter 1, verse 5, the LORD said to Jeremiah, "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."
2. Then again, in chapter 1, verse 10 -- "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."
3. Chapters 46 through 51 have been described as a collection of Jeremiah's "prophetic indictments of the Gentiles, delivered at various periods" (Unger).
4. Egypt comes first (46:2), then the Philistines (47:1), then Moab (48:1), then the Ammonites (49:1), then Edom (49:7), then Damascus (49:23), then Kedar (49:28), then Elam (49:34), then Babylon (50:1; 51:1).
5. Jeremiah 52 is retrospective, reviewing again the overthrow of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar and his army (cf. Jer. 39). 6. With the exception of verses 27 and 28, which predicts the restoration of Israel in the last days, chapter 46 deals with God's judgment upon Egypt.

I. KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR WAS GOD'S INSTRUMENT OF JUDGMENT

1. Three times in the book of Jeremiah, King Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as God's "servant" (25:9; 27:6; 43:10).
2. Here in Jeremiah 46:2, the LORD says that He is "against Egypt," and "against the army of Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt."
3. This Pharaoh-necho king of Egypt is the Egyptian king that killed King Josiah on the battlefield of Megiddo. This is recorded in II Chronicles 35:20-27.
4. But then four years later, Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh-necho at the Battle of Carchemish. This defeat broke the power of Egypt, and made Babylon the great power in that part of the world.
5. Jeremiah prophesied the defeat of Pharaoh-necho before it happened (46:1 ff).
6. Merrill Unger said this about Jeremiah's prophecy, "This prophecy was given, it appears, as the army of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt was poised for battle against the Babylonian forces under Nebuchadnezzar. One of the great decisive military encounters

of all time, it decided the whole course of history when Egypt's ambition was checked and Pharaoh Necho's dream of control of Western Asia crashed in ruin (II Kings 24:7)" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

7. "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt" (II Kings 24:7).

8. Jeremiah 46:3 and 4 describe the preparations for battle, and verses 5 and 6 describe Egypt's defeat.

9. The battle took place at Carchemish (46:2), a Hittite city northeast of Israel on the Euphrates river, first captured by Pharaoh Necho and then taken from him by King Nebuchadnezzar.

10. In poetic language, Jeremiah makes it clear that this was the judgment of God upon the proud Egyptians (46:7-12). They rose up "like a flood" (46:7, 8), but they were quickly put down.

11. The Ethiopians and the Libyans, and the Lydians (46:9) were mercenaries working for Egypt (cf. verse 16, and verse 21 -- "her hired men").

12. The term, "the day of the LORD" (46:10) is usually used in reference to the coming tribulation and events surrounding the second coming of Christ, but here it is a prophecy of Egypt's defeat at Carchemish.

13. Unger says it "prophetically illustrates the final decimation of the LORD'S enemies at the second advent of Christ" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

14. After defeating Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar would "come and smite the land of Egypt" (46:13; cf. 43:8-13).

15. Nebuchadnezzar's sword (called "the oppressing sword" in verse 16) would "devour" the Egyptians (46:14). Their valiant men would be "swept away...because the LORD did drive them" (46:15).

16. It was Nebuchadnezzar's sword, but "the LORD did drive them" (46:15). "He (the LORD) made many to fall..." (46:16).

17. Nebuchadnezzar was God's "servant" (25:9; 27:6; 43:10). He was God's instrument of judgment.

18. "Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he hath passed the time appointed" (46:17).

In other words, Pharaoh moved too slowly. He could have averted this disaster but he failed to show up on the battlefield at the right time and he passed up his opportunities.

19. In contrast, the King of heaven and earth, the LORD of hosts, is always on schedule, and His servant Nebuchadnezzar would come at God's appointed time (46:18).

20. Egypt is referred to three times in this chapter as "the daughter of Egypt" (46:11, 19, 24). She was "like a very fair heifer" (46:20), about to be slaughtered by the Babylonian army (46:20-24).

21. The fleeing Egyptians were like serpents, escaping the invading Babylonian soldiers who came against them like woodcutters with axes (46:22, 23).

22. The great Babylonian army was like a swarm of "grasshoppers, and are innumerable" (46:23b).

23. Egypt was like a helpless young woman, overpowered and unable to escape her attacker (46:24).

24. The LORD punished Egypt because they worshipped false gods and idols (46:25, 26).

25. The Babylonians also worshipped false gods and idols, and after the LORD was finished using them to punish Judah and Egypt, He judged them too (cf. 50:1, 2).

26. Though God judged Egypt, and they are no longer a world power, God in His grace and mercy promised Egypt that her country would be rebuilt, and it was -- "and afterward it shall be inhabited, as in the days of old, saith the LORD" (46:26b).

II. THE FUTURE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL (46:27, 28)

1. This promise was originally given in Jeremiah 30:10 and 11.

2. Unger said God's love for Israel "shines all the more resplendently against the visitation of His judgment upon the wicked" (Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament).

3. Jeremiah chapter 46 ends with words of encouragement and hope: "But fear not thou, O my servant Jacob, and be not dismayed, O Israel: for, behold, I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and be in rest and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. Fear thou not..."

CONCLUSION:

1. In Jeremiah 25:15, the LORD said to the prophet Jeremiah, "Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it."

2. All the nations were made to drink the cup of judgment, starting with "Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah" (25:16-18, cf. verses 27, 28).

3. First Peter 4:17 says, "that judgment must begin at the house of God."

4. Next: "Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people" (25:19).

5. Jeremiah 25:15 and following looks beyond God's judgment of Judah, and Egypt, and ancient Babylon, and includes God's judgment upon all the nations at the second coming of Christ.

6. The Scofield Study Bible says, "The prophecy leaps to the very end of this age."

TEXT: Jeremiah 47:1-7

TITLE: ORACLE AGAINST THE PHILISTINES

BIG IDEA:

GOD CONTROLS THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE PHILISTINES

INTRODUCTION:

When **the sword of the Lord** has been unleashed in judgment against sin, it cannot be restrained or mitigated by human intention or intervention. The God of all the nations will establish His sovereignty and use whatever human instrumentation He chooses to accomplish His judgment purposes. Destruction will be overwhelming, paralyzing and devastating. Terror, despair and mourning will replace all previous attitudes of arrogance and independence. God's enemies will not have the last word.

Ryken: Sometimes people wonder what in the world God is doing. What the God of all nations is doing is ruling and judging the nations in order to save them.

GOD CONTROLS THE ULTIMATE FATE OF THE PHILISTINES

(:1-2A) PROLOGUE:

“That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh conquered Gaza. Thus says the LORD:”

Byron Chesney: The name “*Philistine*” comes from the Hebrew word *Philistia*, and the Greek rendering of the name is, *palaistinei*. This is where the term “*Palestine*” comes from. The Philistines were some of the most feared enemies of God's people. They were brutal warriors when they fought and they were more advanced than the Israelites. They knew how to forge steel and make weapons from it. . . The Philistine's land ranged from Joppa, which is now called Tel-Aviv, all the way southward to Gaza (we've all familiar with the Gaza Strip). This area contained the five cities of the Philistines: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, and was known as *Philistia*, or the Land of the Philistines.

Feinberg: the somewhat indefinite historical reference in v. 1 makes it difficult to date this prophecy. One view identifies the Pharaoh as Neco, who conquered Gaza about the time he defeated Josiah at Megiddo (cf. **2 Kings 23:29-30**); another view sees the Pharaoh as Neco capturing Gaza on his return from his defeat at Carchemish; still another view identifies the Pharaoh as Hophra, who took Gaza in his campaign against Tyre and Sidon. The historical data are lacking, so it is difficult to make an identification as to the time or the occasion of the attack.

I. (:2B-5) ULTIMATE FATE OF THE PHILISTINES

A. (:2B-4) Severe Judgment

1. (:2B) Overwhelming Conquest

*“Behold, waters are going to rise from the north
And become an overflowing torrent,
And overflow the land and all its fullness,
The city and those who live in it;
And the men will cry out,
And every inhabitant of the land will wail.”*

Parunak: These verses appear to describe two conquests of Gaza: one by Pharaoh, from Egypt, and thus from the south, and another from the north, probably by the Babylonians. The people would have naturally feared their traditional ally Egypt; when their ultimate disaster would come from the north.

Byron Chesney: The Bible often uses water and flooding as symbols of multitudes of people. This is a description of the vast number of soldiers that will rise up out of Babylon and they will emerge upon the Philistines like an overflowing river. The Philistines will not know what happened they will be so overwhelmed. They will run and cry and howl in fear and pain.

2. (:3) Paralyzing Terror

*“Because of the noise of the galloping hoofs of his stallions,
The tumult of his chariots, and the rumbling of his wheels,
The fathers have not turned back for their children,
Because of the limpness of their hands,”*

David Guzik: Jeremiah described the tragedy of the coming Babylonian invasion. It would bring such crisis and fear that natural affection and courage would be forgotten.

Mackay: The war horses of the cavalry presented a dire threat to the lightly armed infantry of the day and the impact of their thundering advance was reinforced by the clatter of the chariots. Their wheels were massive, often as high as a man, and any not able to get out of their way fast enough would be crushed under them. Even without any fighting, the impact of the invasion would be devastating.

3. (:4) Devastating Destruction

*“On account of the day that is coming
To destroy all the Philistines,
To cut off from Tyre and Sidon
Every ally that is left;
For the LORD is going to destroy the Philistines,
The remnant of the coastland of Caphtor.”*

Parunak: Three sections in these verses.

1. **2a**, The approaching destruction.

The northern army is pictured as an overflowing flood. Cf. the image of the Assyrian in **Isa. 8:5-8**; the Egyptians attacking Babylon in **46:7-8**. Ever since God destroyed the world with a flood, floods have been terrifying images of destruction.

2. **2b, 3a**, The first reason for fear. The inhabitants howl because of the sounds of war around them. When the true judgment does fall, they are properly afraid, and realize that it is far worse than an Egyptian raid. But their fear is focused on the symptoms of the invasion, not the cause.

3. **3b, 4**, The second reason for fear. Ultimately, the reason that people are so terrified is that “*the Lord will spoil the Philistines.*” As with Egypt, so here, the real enemy is not Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is just the rod of the Lord’s anger. Unless sinners see that it is their Creator with whom they have to do, they will never see the true significance of the judgments that fall upon them.

Longman: In the context of the destruction of Philistia the two Phoenician seaport powers of Tyre and Sidon are mentioned. These cities were further north up the coast in what is today Lebanon. Now that the Philistines are overtaken, they cannot provide further aid to their trading partners in the north.

B. (:5) Intense Mourning

*“Baldness has come upon Gaza;
Ashkelon has been ruined.
O remnant of their valley,
How long will you gash yourself?”*

Adam Clarke: “*valley*” - Or *plain*; for the whole land of the Philistines was a vast plain, which extended along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea from Phoenicia to the frontiers of Egypt. The whole of this plain, the territory of the Philistines, shall be desolated.

II. (:6-7) UNRELENTING SWORD OF THE LORD

A. (:6) Question – Begging for an End to God’s Destructive Power

*“Ah, sword of the LORD,
How long will you not be quiet?
Withdraw into your sheath;
Be at rest and stay still.”*

Adam Clarke: The whole of this chapter is remarkably elegant. The address to the sword of Jehovah, at the close of it, is particularly a very beautiful and bold personification,

Longman: The oracle against Philistia ends with an address to the *sword of the Lord*, which is here personified and represents God’s destructive power. In the Hebrew it is unclear who is speaking to the sword. . . The best approach is to imagine the Philistines begging the sword of the Lord to desist. But **v. 7** answers their question by stating that it cannot stop as long as God has ordered it to attack.

B. (:7) Answer – God’s Destructive Power Must Finish its Assigned Task

*“How can it be quiet,
When the LORD has given it an order?
Against Ashkelon and against the seacoast—
There He has assigned it.”*

Adam Clarke: The Philistines were ever the implacable enemies of the Jews, and the basest and worst of all idolaters. On these accounts the sword of the Lord had its commission against them; and it did its office most fearfully and effectually by the hand of the Chaldeans.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Why does God’s judgment strike us as so harsh?
- 2) How were the Philistines deserving of such severe judgment?
- 3) What comfort can God’s people take from these messages of judgment?
- 4) Does our call to repentance contain the element of the threat of the imminent sword of the Lord coming to execute divine wrath?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: This chapter describes God’s judgment against the Philistines, a seafaring people from Crete who inhabited the coastal areas of Israel and were perpetually at war with God’s people. In spite of their contact with the knowledge of the truth, they never accepted it as a nation, and so come under God’s judgement.

This record suggests three errors that unbelievers make when God’s judgment falls on them.

- a) (:1-2) They fear the wrong things. Their attention is consumed by relatively small disasters, and they miss sight of the big one just around the corner. E.g., people are more worried about environmental pollution than about spiritual pollution.
- b) (:2-4) They fear the right things, but for the wrong reasons. They think their pain results from physical circumstances alone, and ignore God’s agency.
- c) (:5-7) They respond in the wrong way, rebelling against God even as they suffer.

Gregg Allen:

I. THE SETTING OF THE PROPHECY (v. 1).

- A. This is part of the description of judgments that will be administered on all the surrounding nations through Babylon (**chps. 46-51**).
- B. It is given at a time before Pharaoh Necho attacked Gaza.
- C. It concerns Philistia; a nation that occupied the south-western area from Judea - who were long-standing troublemakers of Israel.

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE JUDGMENT (vv. 2-5).

- A. It describes the rise of Babylon against them - overwhelming them like a flood.
- B. It describes battle so fierce that fathers will even abandon their children in fear.
- C. It describes the cutting off of even the most prosperous and proud of cities in the region; and the failure of all those who they may look to for help.
- D. It describes such despair that the Philistines cut themselves and shave their heads in anguish.

III. THE FULFILLMENT OF THE APPOINTMENT (vv. 6-7).

- A. The prophet rhetorically asks how long the sword will devour.
- B. He answers his own question by showing that it was given a charge by the Lord; and that it must not cease until its appointment is completed.

James Barker: **THE PHILISTINES (47:1)**

1. The Babylonian army is described as "*an overflowing flood*" that shall overflow the land of the Philistines (**47:1, 2**).
2. The invasion would be so terrible that fathers would flee for their lives and leave their children behind (**47:3**).
3. Once again, the Babylonians were the instruments of God's judgment -- "*for the LORD will spoil the Philistines*" (**47:4; cf. 47:6, 7**).
4. Tyrus and Zidon (**47:4**) were Phoenician cities of Philistine origin, but they would have no power to help because it was the Lord who was about to destroy the Philistines.
5. Making oneself bald and cutting oneself were heathen customs of mourning and self-mutilation (**47:5**). The Bible condemns these pagan customs. **Leviticus 19:27 and 28** says, "*Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD.*"
6. **First Kings 18:28** says that up on Mount Carmel, the devilish prophets of Baal

"cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them."

7. These demonic practices are still around today. For example, recent studies have shown that many girls between the ages of 10 and 18 are now cutting themselves with razor blades.

8. I have read articles about frenzied young people cutting themselves at a rock concert. Recently articles have stated that Justin Beiber fans have been posting pictures of themselves cutting themselves as a way of pleading with him to stop smoking marijuana.

9. Sometimes the prophets refer to shaving as a picture of judgment. **Isaiah 7:20** says, *"In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, namely, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard."*

Brian Bell: Judgment on Philistia! (1-7)

1.1. **1** - We believe the Philistines came across the water from the Isle of Crete (Caphtor in **vs.4**).

1.1.1. They built a wealthy nation by being Merchant marines.

1.1.2. They sailed the Mediterranean acquiring goods from any lands.

1.1.3. Yet, their destiny was destruction!

1.2. **2** - Now Jeremiah uses the "*flood image*" of Babylon pouring over the land. {last used of Egypt **46:7**}

1.3. **3** – So terrible was the invasion that parents would flee for their lives, & leave the kids behind!

1.3.1. Yet, check out **49:11** "*Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; And let your widows trust in Me.*"

1.4. **5** – They act like mourners at a funeral, shaving their heads.

1.5. **6,7** – Q: When will you put away your sword Lord?

1.5.1. A: How can I put it away till judgment is over?

1.5.1.1. Chilling words!

1.5.2. "*God judges a man, not by the point he has reached, but by the way he is facing; not by distance, but by direction.*"

1.5.2.1. Q: Which way are you facing?

1.5.3. A stanza in The Battle Hymn of the Republic describes this scene well, "He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat." (**Julia Ward Howe**.)

TEXT: Jeremiah 48:1-47

TITLE: ORACLE AGAINST MOAB

BIG IDEA:

**PRIDE AND IDOLATRY WILL NOT GO UNJUDGED –
DESPITE SEEMINGLY INVINCIBLE STRENGTH**

INTRODUCTION:

When someone has lived for a long time in a nation that has enjoyed peace and prosperity because of their superior military capabilities, it is inevitable that self-confidence and self-sufficiency take hold. Moab with her lofty strongholds offers a graphic picture of God shattering the pride of those who think they are invincible. God is described as the “Lord of hosts” because His sovereign reign extends over all nations. He is not just concerned with the affairs of Judah. The “*Woes*” heard here, a frequent expression in the culture during times of mourning at funerals, shows that God describes the nation as if it were already dead.

Parunak: Major break between **28-29**:

- a) **29-47** is mostly reworked quotations from Isaiah and Numbers; **1-28** is almost entirely original (though the two halves do trade images back and forth)
- b) The structure of **1-28** is symmetric, while that of **29-47** is syntactic (dialog between Jer and the Lord).

**PRIDE AND IDOLATRY WILL NOT GO UNJUDGED –
DESPITE SEEMINGLY INVINCIBLE STRENGTH**

(:1A) PROLOGUE

“Concerning Moab. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel,”

Chiastic Structure from **Peter Wallace**:

1. “Moab Is Destroyed” – The Exile of Chemosh and His People (v1-8)

**(:1B-5) Overview of Judgment Against Moab –
Shattering (Destruction and Devastation) / Shame and Weeping –
Different Speakers:**

(:1) Voice of the Lord – Woe Against Moab

“Woe to Nebo, for it has been destroyed; Kiriathaim has been put to shame, it has been captured; The lofty stronghold has been put to shame and shattered.”

Constable: The Lord announced the destruction of two key cities in Moab, which was Judah’s neighbor to the southeast: Nebo (**Numbers 32:3; Numbers 32:38**) and Kiriathaim (**Joshua 13:19**). Moab’s boundaries were the Arnon River on the north, the

Arabian Desert on the east, the Zered River on the south, and the Dead Sea on the west. At various times Moab also occupied territory to its north, in the old Amorite kingdom of Sihon (**Numbers 21:21-31**). The Moabite (or Mesha) Stone, erected about 840 B.C, but now in the British Museum, refers to many of the numerous Moabite towns mentioned in this chapter.

(:2) Voice of the Enemy – Planning to Conquer Moab

“There is praise for Moab no longer; In Heshbon they have devised calamity against her: 'Come and let us cut her off from being a nation!' You too, Madmen, will be silenced; The sword will follow after you.”

(:3) Voice of the Witnesses – Acknowledging the Destruction and Devastation

“The sound of an outcry from Horonaim, 'Devastation and great destruction!'”

Mackay: Each time one of the great cities of Moab is mentioned it is accompanied by a prediction of impending catastrophe to drive home the theme that there is inescapable judgment about to engulf the country from which its centres of economic and military might will not be exempted.

(:4-5) Voice of the People – Weeping on the Road to Captivity

“Moab is broken, Her little ones have sounded out a cry of distress. For by the ascent of Luhith They will ascend with continual weeping; For at the descent of Horonaim They have heard the anguished cry of destruction.”

(:6-8) Exile of Chemosh and His People

(:6) Command to Flee

“Flee, save your lives, That you may be like a juniper in the wilderness.”

(:7-8) Certain Capture and Destruction

“For because of your trust in your own achievements and treasures, Even you yourself will be captured; And Chemosh will go off into exile Together with his priests and his princes. And a destroyer will come to every city, So that no city will escape; The valley also will be ruined, And the plateau will be destroyed, As the LORD has said.

Folly of trusting in your own achievements and wealth

2. “Give Wings to Moab” – Her Cities Shall Become a Desolation (v9-10)

*“Give wings to Moab, For she will flee away;
And her cities will become a desolation, Without inhabitants in them.
Cursed be the one who does the LORD's work negligently,
And cursed be the one who restrains his sword from blood.”*

Constable: The Lord uttered a curse on any of the soldiers that would not carry out His will against Moab as He had ordered

3. “Moab Shall Be Ashamed of Chemosh” – the Broken Vessels of Moab
(v11-13)

“Moab has been at ease since his youth; He has also been undisturbed on his lees, Neither has he been emptied from vessel to vessel, Nor has he gone into exile. Therefore he retains his flavor, And his aroma has not changed. ‘Therefore behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I shall send to him those who tip vessels, and they will tip him over, and they will empty his vessels and shatter his jars. And Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence.’”

This will be a new experience for Moab; their confidence will be transformed into their shame

Wiersbe: Because the nation had been comfortable and self-sufficient, they were unprepared for what happened. The Babylonians emptied the wine from jar to jar and then broke the jars! Instead of sitting on their mountainous throne, the nation had to come down and grovel on the parched earth (**vv. 18-20**). The horn and the arm are both symbols of strength (**v. 25**), but Moab’s horn was cut off and her arm broken. She had no strength.

Kidner: For defence, Moab had towering cliffs, and for wealth, her enormous flocks of sheep; riches that were self-renewing. But the shelter of these things had bred more complacency than character. In some famous lines, **verse 11** makes it clear that to be undisturbed may be better treatment for a wine than for a nation: that (as we might say) to be mellow and full-bodied is the wrong excellence to aspire to!

Mackay: Nations left too long to enjoy prosperity become arrogant; there is a discipline in hardship and defeat which Moab has not experienced. So what should have been of good quality has become harsh.

Thompson: **vv. 11-12** – These verses refer to the fact that Moab had never suffered exile like Judah. She may have been subject to Israel for a time and been defeated in battle but she had never suffered the deep anguish of exile. She lay outside the normal route of the invaders of the Middle East and was rarely disturbed.

4. “Grieve for Him” – the LORD Calls for Lamentation Over Moab (v14-20)
(:14-15) Failure of Moab’s Military

“How can you say, ‘We are mighty warriors, And men valiant for battle? Moab has been destroyed, and men have gone up to his cities; His choicest young men have also gone down to the slaughter,’ Declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts.”

Mackay: The Moabites obviously considered themselves to have prowess in military affairs, but their boasting will be shown to be misplaced by the impending disaster.

(:16-17) Command to Onlookers to Witness

“The disaster of Moab will soon come, And his calamity has swiftly hastened. Mourn for him, all you who live around him, Even all of you who know his name; Say, ‘How has the mighty scepter been broken, A staff of splendor!’”

(:18) Command to Moabites to Witness

‘Come down from your glory And sit on the parched ground, O daughter dwelling in Dibon, For the destroyer of Moab has come up against you, He has ruined your strongholds.’”

(:19) Command to Moabites to Witness

“Stand by the road and keep watch, O inhabitant of Aroer; Ask him who flees and her who escapes And say, ‘What has happened?’”

(:20) Command to Onlookers to Witness

“Moab has been put to shame, for it has been shattered. Wail and cry out; Declare by the Arnon That Moab has been destroyed.”

5. Judgment Upon the Cities (v21-25)

(:21-24) Fate of Moab’s Major Cities

“Judgment has also come upon the plain, upon Holon, Jahzah, and against Mephaath, against Dibon, Nebo, and Beth-diblathaim, against Kiriathaim, Beth-gamul, and Beth-meon, against Kerioth, Bozrah, and all the cities of the land of Moab, far and near.”

(:25) Failure of Moab’s Military

“‘The horn of Moab has been cut off, and his arm broken,’ declares the LORD.”

Mackay: The horn of an animal was an obvious symbol of its ferocity and strength, and it is used in Scripture to refer to the power of individuals and nations. But once an animal’s horns had been cut off it was powerless to resist its enemies. So here Moab has been deprived of the resources to withstand those invading here. The broken arm, powerless to grasp scepter or sword, is another vivid picture of military defeat (**Ezek. 3:21**). The strength of the nation is exhausted before its aggressors.

6. “Make Him Drunk” – He Magnified Himself against the LORD (v26-27)

“Make him drunk, for he has become arrogant toward the LORD; so Moab will wallow in his vomit, and he also will become a laughingstock. Now was not Israel a laughingstock to you? Or was he caught among thieves? For each time you speak about him you shake your head in scorn.”

Thompson: The picture of a drunken man doubled over by vomiting is both disgusting and likely to provoke derision. Once Moab had laughed at Israel as she drank the cup of Yahweh's wrath, regarding her as a laughingstock and treating her as a thief who has been punished. The tables are turned. Moab is an object of derision as she must flee from her cities and go to live in places of refuge in the high mountains.

Constable: The nation would also become an object of ridicule, like a drunkard who wallows in his own vomit, because it became arrogant toward Yahweh. Implicit here is the idea of Moab drinking from the cup of Yahweh's wrath that produces drunkenness, staggering, insanity, and vomiting (cf. **Jeremiah 25:15-29; Jeremiah 49:12-13; Jeremiah 51:6-10; Jeremiah 51:39; Jeremiah 51:57; Isaiah 51:17-23;** et al.). The nation had not humbled itself under Yahweh's sovereign authority, and now judgment would come.

7. The Reason for God's Judgment: The Pride of Moab (v28-30)

(:28) Command to Flee

“Leave the cities and dwell among the crags, O inhabitants of Moab, And be like a dove that nests Beyond the mouth of the chasm.”

(:29-30) Judgment Justified -- Pride of Moab Condemned

“We have heard of the pride of Moab-- he is very proud-- Of his haughtiness, his pride, his arrogance and his self-exaltation. ‘I know his fury,’ declares the LORD, ‘But it is futile; His idle boasts have accomplished nothing.’”

Mackay: six terms are heaped up to reinforce the depiction of Moab's pride, and five of these provide an extended example of assonance which builds up a cumulative picture of the intense pride that characterizes Moab as she asserts her self-sufficiency.

6'. “I Have Made the Wine Cease” – Gladness and Joy Are Taken Away (v31-33)

“Therefore I shall wail for Moab, Even for all Moab shall I cry out; I will moan for the men of Kir-heres. More than the weeping for Jazer I shall weep for you, O vine of Sibmah! Your tendrils stretched across the sea, They reached to the sea of Jazer; Upon your summer fruits and your grape harvest The destroyer has fallen. So gladness and joy are taken away From the fruitful field, even from the land of Moab. And I have made the wine to cease from the wine presses; No one will tread them with shouting, The shouting will not be shouts of joy.”

Wiersbe: The remarkable thing is that Jeremiah wept over the fall of Moab (**Jer. 48:31**) and lamented like a flutist at a funeral (**vv. 36-38**). Certainly his grief is evidence of the compassion God has for people who are destroyed because of their sins against the Lord. God has *“no pleasure in the death of [the wicked]”* (**Ezek. 18:32**) and does all

He can to call them to repentance before judgment falls.

5'. Judgment Upon the Cities (v34)

“From the outcry at Heshbon even to Elealeh, even to Jahaz they have raised their voice, from Zoar even to Horonaim and to Eglath-shelishiyah; for even the waters of Nimrim will become desolate.”

4'. “My Heart Mourns for Moab” – the LORD Laments Over Moab (v35-36)
(:35) Judgment Justified – Idolatry Condemned

“‘And I shall make an end of Moab,’ declares the LORD, ‘the one who offers sacrifice on the high place and the one who burns incense to his gods.’”

(:36) Wailing and Lamentation

“‘Therefore My heart wails for Moab like flutes; My heart also wails like flutes for the men of Kir-heres. Therefore they have lost the abundance it produced.’”

3'. “Moab Put to Shame” – God Breaks Moab Like a Useless Vessel (v37-39)

“For every head is bald and every beard cut short; there are gashes on all the hands and sackcloth on the loins. On all the housetops of Moab and in its streets there is lamentation everywhere; for I have broken Moab like an undesirable vessel,’ declares the LORD. ‘How shattered it is! How they have wailed! How Moab has turned his back-- he is ashamed! So Moab will become a laughingstock and an object of terror to all around him.’”

2'. “Wings Against Moab” – Because He Magnified Himself against the LORD
(v40-42)

“For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, one will fly swiftly like an eagle, And spread out his wings against Moab. Kerioth has been captured And the strongholds have been seized, So the hearts of the mighty men of Moab in that day Will be like the heart of a woman in labor. And Moab will be destroyed from being a people Because he has become arrogant toward the LORD.’”

Longman: The eagle may be a particularly apt image for the destruction of countries like Moab and Edom because they were nations of fortresses and cave refuges.

1'. “Moab Destroyed” – the Destruction of Chemosh and His People (v43-46)

(:43-44) Captivity of Moabites

“‘Terror, pit, and snare are coming upon you, O inhabitant of Moab,’ declares the LORD. ‘The one who flees from the terror Will fall into the pit, And the one who climbs up out of the pit Will be caught in the snare; For I shall bring upon her, even upon Moab, The year of their punishment,’ declares the LORD.’”

(:45-46) Judgment and Destruction

“In the shadow of Heshbon The fugitives stand without strength; For a fire has gone forth from Heshbon, And a flame from the midst of Sihon, And it has devoured the forehead of Moab And the scalps of the riotous revelers. Woe to you, Moab! The people of Chemosh have perished; For your sons have been taken away captive, And your daughters into captivity.”

P.S., “I Will Restore the Fortunes of Moab” (v47) -- Epilogue

“Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab In the latter days,’ declares the LORD. Thus far the judgment on Moab.”

Constable: Yet Yahweh promised to restore the fortunes of Moab in the distant future (cf. **Jeremiah 46:26; Jeremiah 49:6; Jeremiah 49:39**). This happened after the Exile, and it will happen in the eschaton when modern residents of Moab’s territory will stream to Jerusalem to worship Messiah in the Millennium.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) How is the sin problem described in this oracle?
- 2) What is the significance of all of the references here to shame and humiliation?
- 3) What vestiges of self-confidence and self-sufficiency need to be addressed in our own lives?
- 4) How can the Lord and Jeremiah lament and grieve and mourn over the destruction of such a sinful, pagan nation?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Five paragraphs:

- a) **37-38**, The people mourn because the Lord has broken Moab.
 - 1) The disaster is described as psychological.
 - 2) **38b** gives the reason for the disaster: The Lord himself has shattered the nation like a vessel that bring him no pleasure.
- b) **39-40**, The nation is broken (better, dismayed) and ashamed because the invader has come.

Again, the emphasis is on psychic pain.

An invader who comes like a swift bird of prey was one of the curses promised

to Israel if they disobeyed the covenant (**Deut. 28:49**), and Jer has already reported the coming of Neb against Judah in terms of this metaphor (**4:13**). Now we see the same curse directed against Moab.

- c) **41-42**, Destruction and suffering have come because they have magnified themselves against the Lord. This is the central paragraph of the chiasm.

The description of the judgment differs from those on either side by including material loss as well as psychic pain.

The reason for the judgment goes deepest to the heart of the matter: Moab's sin of pride. This is why the Lord must judge her (first and fourth paragraphs) by means of human armies (second and fifth). Thus the focus falls on the sin with which the interchange began in **29-30**, the unseemly pride of Moab. The wording here was also seen in **v. 26**, and the manifestation of pride, trusting in their own works and treasures, led off in **v. 7**.

Application: Beware the fundamental sin, that of unbelief.

- d) **43-44**, Terror will come upon the Moabites, because the Lord will visit them.

The judgment in this verse is a word-play in Hebrew: "fear" is *paxad*, "the pit" (used to trap large animals) is *pazat*, and "the snare" (a trap for small animals) is *pax*. Moab will be hunted down like a wild animal, and though she may escape the first danger or the second, she cannot evade all three.

The explanation returns us once again to the Lord's agency, as in **v. 38**.

- e) **45**, Those who trust in Heshbon are without strength, because the city will burn up.

Better translation of **45**: "*They that fled stand without strength under the shadow of Heshbon.*" They come from the villages to the great city where they hope to find defense, but when they get there they are "*without strength*" because the enemy is already within the city.

"*From the midst of Sihon*:" Heshbon was one of the Moabite cities captured by Sihon, and later inhabited by Reuben and Gad. Though the Moabites regained it by the end of the Divided Kingdom, the mention of Sihon here calls up visions of the enemy comfortably ensconced within one's own fortress. In fact, the reason here is from Num. 21:28, where it is part of an ancient song dating back to before the time of Moses.

Application: Looking back over these five paragraphs, we see two lessons:

- 1) The impoverishment of Moab has two forms. There is physical loss (**41a**), but most of the emphasis is the psychic loss, the mourning, shame, and sorrow that they must

bear. And in fact, that is the real suffering. Those who do not love this present world, who can use material things without loving them, do not suffer when they are taken away. The suffering that comes from loss of wealth really results from the ungodly love we have for such things.

2) The reason for this judgment is ultimately their failure to trust in the Lord. Thus he judges them, by the hand of human armies. It is important to keep in mind these successive layers of cause, and avoid fallacious “either-or” questions.

Peter Wallace: Politics and the Kingdom of God – The Pride of Moab

The “*jeremiad*” is a political sermon in which an author bitterly laments the state of society, with a warning against the imminent downfall of society due to its moral degradation. It is (appropriately) named after the prophet Jeremiah. Who are the Moabites? Moab was one of the sons of Lot, Abraham’s nephew. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah Lot and his daughters fled into the hills. Isolated and alone, Lot’s daughters got their father drunk and slept with him – both getting pregnant. From one came the Ammonites – from the other the Moabites.

Over the next several hundred years, while the Israelites were in Egypt, the Ammonites and Moabites became the dominant powers in the area where Sodom and Gomorrah had been (the east side of the Dead Sea). When Israel came out of Egypt they had to go around the Dead Sea – through the land of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites.

In **Numbers 21-25**, a Moabite king (Balak) was the one who summoned Balaam in an attempt to curse Israel. Balaam refused to curse Israel – but blessed Israel instead – and yet Balaam still advised Balak how to curse Israel! (**Numbers 31**) Balaam was the one who suggested that Balak send the women out to sleep with Israelite men and convince them to worship Moabite gods. In **Deuteronomy 2**, God tells Israel not to attack the Moabites “*because I have given Ar to the people of Lot for a possession.*” (**2:9**) This is one of the passages that establishes the biblical teaching that God has given to each nation its own territorial integrity. How do you know the proper boundaries for each nation? The simple answer is: whatever they are right now – that’s what God has given them. God is not saying that every nation obtained those boundaries justly! (and if there is a boundary dispute, you can’t just say “We’re taking it by force – therefore God gave it to us!”) But, as Paul will say in **Romans 13** – “*the authorities that exist have been instituted by God.*” (**Romans 13:1**)

But God clearly tells Israel that he has given boundaries to every nation. So God tells Israel not to invade the Moabites – but he also tells Israel that no Moabite or Ammonite may enter the assembly of the Lord “*even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the Lord forever.*” (**Dt 23:3**) Why? “*because they did not meet you with bread and water on the way, when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired Balaam... You shall not seek their peace or their prosperity all your days forever.*” (**23:6**)

The Moabites remain largely hostile to Israel throughout the centuries. During the times

of the Judges, Eglon, King of Moab, ruled Israel for 18 years, before Ehud arose and rescued Israel from his hand (**Judges 3**). That's what makes it so curious that Elimelech and Naomi would go to Moab during a famine (in the days of the Judges). The idea that their sons would marry Moabite women – Orpah and Ruth – is deeply disturbing, because Moabite women were the ones who corrupted Israelite men in the days of Moses and Balaam. And yet, the story of Ruth reminds us that God's purpose is the redemption of all nations. Even the Moabites!

When Ruth's descendant, David, is fleeing from King Saul, he will ask the King of Moab to protect his family (**1 Samuel 22**). And for some unknown reason, David pursues vengeance against Moab in **2 Sam 8**. From the time of David until the days of Ahab, the Moabites would be under the rule of Israel. Solomon will get in trouble for building a high place for Chemosh – in order to please his Moabite wife (**1 Kings 11**). But in **2 Kings 1 and 3** we hear about Moabite rebellions in the days of Ahab, and after those days, the Moabites continue to reappear as enemies of Israel and Judah.

Isaiah 15-16 contain Isaiah's oracles against Moab – in the time of Hezekiah. **Ezekiel 25** and **Amos 2** also include oracles against Moab. **Zephaniah 2:9-11** says that Moab will become like Sodom and Gomorrah: *"Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Moab shall become like Sodom, and the Ammonites like Gomorrah, a land possessed by nettles and salt pits, and a waste forever. The remnant of my people shall plunder them, and the survivors of my nation shall possess them." 10 This shall be their lot in return for their pride, because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts. 11 The LORD will be awesome against them; for he will famish all the gods of the earth, and to him shall bow down, each in its place, all the lands of the nations."*

Moab had its roots in the ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah. And Moab will end like them. Why? "Because they taunted and boasted against the people of the LORD of hosts." Their pride and their arrogance will result in their destruction. While in one sense, this is a particular story with a particular judgment, the pattern is one that applies to all nations. The rulers of the nations need to learn humility! With power come all the temptations of pride. And that is the central point of **Jeremiah 48**.

Some scholars say that **Jeremiah 48** is "disordered" (**Brueggemann**, 442). Whenever I read a scholar saying "this passage is a jumble that makes no sense," I immediately look for a chiasm! It didn't take long to see it – because it is unmistakable! The outside frame – the #1s in the outline – emphasize both the destruction of Moab, and the exile – the captivity of the Moabites and their god, Chemosh. The 2s use the language of "wings" – in the first case, wings to fly away, in the second case (v40-42) wings against Moab – as one comes to destroy. The 3s use the language of shame – and the image of a broken vessel – in the first case God says that he will break the jars of Moab, as Moab is compared to Israel (the northern kingdom) 4 and their shame over Bethel (the shrine to the golden calf); in the second case Moab has become the broken vessel – and is ashamed. The 4s focus on the theme of lament, as verses 14-20 call for a lament over Moab – and then, shockingly, in verse 36, the LORD himself moans over Moab. The 5s

describe a list of cities that come under judgment. The 6s use the theme of drinking – Moab shall be made like Israel – a drunk who is mocked and ridiculed – why “because he magnified himself against the LORD.” And in the second case, the wine is cut off – gladness and joy have been taken away. And at the heart of chapter 48 is the reason for all of this (v29-30): “*We have heard of the pride of Moab – he is very proud – of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance, and the haughtiness of his heart. I know his insolence, declares the LORD; his boasts are false; his deeds are false.*”

The focus of points 1-6 is that judgment is coming – concluding in point 6, “*because he magnified himself against the LORD*” – and then shifting into the first plural in **verse 29** for the centerpiece – the focus on the pride of Moab. Then the focus shifts in points 6-1 – the back side of the chiasm. Now judgment has come, and the coming judgment is spoken of as already present. But this is a very well-crafted chiasm! Because not only do you have this symmetry of language and purpose, but you also have a repeated phrase at the end of point 6 (on the way up) and at the end of point 2 (on the way down) – “*because he magnified himself against the LORD.*”

Just before reaching the center of the chiasm we were told that this is happening to Moab because Moab exalted himself against the LORD. And then just before concluding the oracle, the same phrase comes back. The nation that magnifies itself against the LORD – the nation that tries to make itself look big – and tries to make God look small – will be humiliated – put to shame before their enemies.

Parunak: chiasmic structure – vv. 6-28

- 1A. (:6) Command to Flee
 - 2A. (:7-13) Judgment Pictured
 - 3A. (:14-15) Failure of Moab’s Military
 - 4A. (:16-17) Command to Onlookers to Witness
 - 5A. (:18) Command to Moabites to Witness
 - 5B. (:19) Command to Moabites to Witness
 - 4B. (:20-24) Command to Onlookers to Witness
 - 3B. (:25) Failure of Moab’s Military
 - 2B. (:26-27) Judgment Pictured
- 1B. (:28) Command to Flee

Gregg Allen: Settled on the Dregs of Pride

- I. DESTRUCTION OF THE PRIDEFUL LIFE (vv. 1-8).
- II. REASONS GIVEN FOR THE PRIDE (vv. 9-15).
- III. SUDDEN SHAME UPON THE PRIDEFUL (vv. 16-30).
- IV. MOURNING OVER THE PRIDEFUL ONES' SHAME (vv. 31-39).
- V. PUNISHMENT OF THE PRIDEFUL (vv. 40-46).
- IV. FUTURE HOPE FOR THE FORMERLY PRIDEFUL (v. 47).

Brian Bell: Chapter 48

2. MOAB MEETS THEIR MAKER! (1-5)

2.1. INTRO: This chapter (Moab) & the next (Ammon) have something in common

Q: What is it? (Gen.19:30-38)

2.1.1. Brothers?(sons of Lot); Cousins? (2 sisters / boys)

2.2. During the Babylonian crisis, Moab & Ammon were allies w/Judah in an ill-fated attempt to defeat Neb. (Jer.27:3)

2.2.1. 20 different places are named here. (some we are not sure of exact locations). - The list shows God's great detail when predicting future events.

2.2.2. In 582bc Neb. did this destruction on Moab.

2.3. Moab – High tableland, on far side of the Dead Sea.

2.3.1. Jeremiah (Judah) had ties with Moab through Lot & Who?

2.3.1.1. Ruth (Elimelech & Naomi).

2.3.2. At times they were Israel's bitter enemy.

2.3.3. Their chief problems:

Trusting in works & treasures (7);

Complacency (11);

their god Chemosh (13);

exalting themselves against the Lord (26);

Pride, loftiness, arrogance, & haughtiness of heart (29);

wrath & idle talk (30); offering sacrifices & incense to his gods (35).

2.3.4. They thought they were safe up on their high plateau. They thought "the mighty Chemosh" would protect them!

3. TRUSTING IN TREASURES! (6-10)

3.1. (7) – We'll see Wealth & Treasures bred complacency not character!

3.2. It is said that about 200 years ago, the tomb of the great conqueror Charlemagne was opened. The sight the workmen saw was startling. There was his body in a sitting position, clothed in the most elaborate of kingly garments, with a scepter in his bony hand. On his knee lay the Holy Scriptures, with a cold, lifeless finger pointing to Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

3.3. I read about an old, rich man with a cranky, miserable attitude who visited a Rabbi. The Rabbi was a simple man whose heart was right and he lived a simple life. They weren't together very long before the Rabbi got a wonderful idea on how to illustrate to the man what was wrong. He took him by the hand and he led him over to his window and he said, "Now look out the window and tell me what you see." The man stood there and said, "Well I see some men and some women and I see a few children." The Rabbi took him by the hand and led him across the room to a mirror and said, "Now look there and tell me what you see." The man frowned and said, "Well obviously I see myself." "Interesting", the Rabbi replied. "In the window there is glass, in the mirror there is glass. But the glass of the mirror is covered with a little bit of silver. And no sooner is the silver added than you cease to see others, and only yourself."

3.3.1. Q: Did your troubles start when just a little bit of silver was added, and you stopped looking through and started looking at?

3.4. An old Puritan said, “If you are rich, find God in all; if you are poor find all in God!”

3.5. Absalom was vain about his hair, therefore was he hanged by his hair. (Talmud)

4. BROKEN BOTTLES! (11-15)

4.1. Read – vs.39 – “How she is broken!”

4.1.1. We will look at: Broken Bottles; Broken Staff; Broken Arm; & a Broken Vessel.

4.1.2. “Had Moab been broken before the Lord, she would not have been broken by the Lords!”

4.2. (11) - Complete Complacency!

4.2.1. This pictures Moab self-satisfied, feeling secure, like wine aging in a jar & becoming tastier.

4.2.2. Wine was poured gently from the storage jar to serving jars so as not to disturb the dregs (impurities which settled on the bottom, also called lees[lez]).

4.2.3. Watch out for Complacency! – “Undisturbed might be great for Wine but not for nations, nor for Christians!

4.2.3.1. “Mellow & full bodied is the wrong excellence to aspire to!”

4.2.3.2. Trials are good for us! Q: What’s God stirring up in your life?

4.2.3.3. Epitaph written for himself, James Alberty (1838-1889) He slept beneath the moon, He basked beneath the sun; He lived a life of going-to-do, And died with nothing done.

4.2.3.4. Prov. 1:32 “the complacency of fools will destroy them;”

4.2.3.5. Zeph. 1:12 “And it shall come to pass at that time That I will search Jerusalem with lamps, And punish the men Who are settled in complacency, Who say in their heart, 'The LORD will not do good, Nor will He do evil.'”

4.2.3.6. “It is better to wear out than to rust out.” - George Whitefield

4.2.3.7. Adversity introduces a man to himself. – Let God shake you up. He tells us to Bear Fruit NOT Ferment!

4.2.3.8. God often puts us in situations that are too much for us, so that we will learn that no situation is too much for him.

4.2.4. Now, Babylon will violently shake up & break the Moab vessels!

4.3. (12) – Babylon comes in & tips them over, & breaks their jars.

4.4. (13) – Chemosh – “The destroyer, subdoer, or fishgod of the Moabites.

4.4.1. This god was introduced to Israel by who in 1 Kings 11:7?

4.4.2. 1 Kings 11:7,8 “Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.”

4.4.3. Not much is known of his character except what is written on the Moabite Stone (found 1868, 3'9"long x2'4"wide x1'2"thick) which indicates he was a "savage war god."

5. BROKEN STAFF! (16-20)

5.1. (17) - "How the strong staff is broken" – They once were mighty.

5.2. (18-20) – A bunch of cities named.

6. BROKEN ARM! (21-25)

6.1. (25) – Horn & Arm both symbols of strength. - Yet Moab's arm was broken & horn cut off (strength all gone).

7. BROKEN VESSEL! (26-47)

7.1. (26) – From fermenting wine, to drunk with wine.

7.1.1. They were drunk from the cup that God gave her.

7.1.2. And like someone at a drunken party, she was vomiting & wallowing in it. (there's a picture!)

7.1.3. Spurgeon said it well regarding drunkenness, "Drunkenness is the devil's back door to hell & everything that is hellish. For he that once gives away his brains to drink is ready to be caught by Satan for anything."

7.2. (29) – Pride keeps an individual or a nation from listening to others & from responding to God.

7.2.1. Moab was so proud and arrogant that they could strut sitting down!

7.2.2. Many a bee has been drowned in his own honey.

7.2.3. The guy who is riding a high horse is heading for a fall.

7.3. (31) – "I will wail, I will cry, I will morn" – Jeremiah wept over there fall. Why? Like God Jeremiah had no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

7.3.1. Ezek 18:32 "For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

7.4. (36) – He laments like a flutist at a funeral. (Is.15:5,6 "my heart cries for Moab...")

7.5. (38) – "I have broken Moab like a vessel in which is no pleasure" – A vessel cast aside by the potter as trash, it didn't turn out the way he wanted it to. (JFB)

7.6. (40) – The Babylonians are pictured as an Eagle swooping down on its prey. (see vs.28) Moab is described a little dove hiding in a cave wondering what will happen next.

7.6.1. A dove is no match for an eagle! 6

7.7. (44-46) – No Escape! – Flee from the army, & you'll fall into a pit. Climb out of the pit, & you'll be caught in a trap. Escape the trap, & you'll be engulfed in a fire. Escape the fire, & you'll be captured & taken away to Babylon."

7.7.1. Sinners, no place to hide when God begins to judge.

7.8. (47) – “Yet” – Restoration in the future.

TEXT: Jeremiah 49:1-39

TITLE: ORACLES AGAINST THE SURROUNDING NATIONS

BIG IDEA:

DIVINE JUDGMENT WILL EXPOSE THE ARROGANCE AND FALSE SECURITY OF NATIONS THAT TRUST IN THEIR OWN RESOURCES

INTRODUCTION:

Powerful nations imagine that they are secure and impenetrable. They arrogantly trust in their military strength, their material resources, their defensive strongholds, their wisdom and their history of dominating weaker neighbors. They have a sense of false security and a confidence that their kingdom will endure. However, history has demonstrated that no nation maintains its dominion forever. God has decreed that He will judge nations for their failure to trust Him and submit to His sovereign rule. Only the Kingdom of God will reign in majesty and supremacy forever. How important a lesson for the nations of today.

Kidner: Elam relied on its archers (**35; cf. Is. 22:6**), Ammon on its Molech (Milcom, v. **3**), Edom on its cleverness and its crags (v. **7, 16**), Damascus on its fame (**25**), Kedar on its remoteness and its mobility (**29, 31**). Cf. **9:23-24**

DIVINE JUDGMENT WILL EXPOSE THE ARROGANCE AND FALSE SECURITY OF NATIONS THAT TRUST IN THEIR OWN RESOURCES

I. (:1-6) ORACLE AGAINST AMMON – FALSE SECURITY EXPOSED – WHO WILL COME AGAINST ME?

“Concerning the sons of Ammon. Thus says the LORD:”

Parunak: Like the Moabites, the Ammonites were continually scrapping with Israel.

- 1) They flowed back into their ancestral territory in the vacuum left when Assyria took the northern tribes (including the Trans Jordanian settlements) into captivity.
- 2) **Jer. 40:15**, sponsored the assassination of Gedaliah, perhaps in an attempt to extend their control even west of the Jordan.
- 3) Central in the resistance to the rebuilding of the city walls in **Neh (4:1ff)**.

A. (:1-2) Judgment Levied for Land Grabbing

1. (:1) Guilty of Snatching Territory from Israel

“Does Israel have no sons?

Or has he no heirs?

Why then has Malcam taken possession of Gad

And his people settled in its cities?”

Feinberg: These rhetorical questions connote reproach.

Clarke: The Ammonites, it appears, took advantage of the depressed state of Israel, and invaded their territories in the tribe of Gad, hoping to make them their own forever. But the prophet intimates that God will preserve the descendants of Israel, and will bring them back to their forfeited inheritances.

2. (:2) Israel Will Retake Possession of Her Land

*“Therefore behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD,
‘That I will cause a trumpet blast of war to be heard
Against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon;
And it will become a desolate heap,
And her towns will be set on fire.
Then Israel will take possession of his possessors,’
Says the LORD.”*

B. (:3-5) Judgment Levied for Arrogance

1. (:3) Judgment Bewailed

*“Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai has been destroyed!
Cry out, O daughters of Rabbah,
Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament,
And rush back and forth inside the walls;
For Malcam will go into exile
Together with his priests and his princes.”*

Kidner: Long before the return of this region to Jewish hands, Ammon was to be in trouble: first through Nebuchadnezzar’s reprisals in 582 for Gedaliah’s murder, and soon afterwards, fatally, through a wave of invasions from the Arabian desert, by tribes which overran not only her but Moab and Edom. By the end of the century all three peoples had been driven out, and their territories taken over.

2. (:4) Judgment Unexpected but Deserved

*“How boastful you are about the valleys!
Your valley is flowing away,
O backsliding daughter
Who trusts in her treasures, saying,
‘Who will come against me?’”*

David Guzik: The Ammonites believed their geography would help defend them against the Babylonians, but it was a poorly placed trust. The same could be said as they trusted in her treasures. All would fail them in the days of judgment.

3. (:5) Judgment Described

*“Behold, I am going to bring terror upon you,’
Declares the Lord GOD of hosts,
‘From all directions around you;
And each of you will be driven out headlong,
With no one to gather the fugitives together.”*

Constable: Yahweh promised to terrorize the Ammonites with enemies that would attack from all directions (cf. **Jeremiah 49:29; Jeremiah 6:25; Jeremiah 20:3-4; Jeremiah 20:10; Jeremiah 46:5**). No one would be able to organize the fugitives because the scattering would be so great.

C. (:6) Merciful Future Restoration

*“But afterward I will restore
The fortunes of the sons of Ammon,
Declares the LORD.”*

Parunak: Summary

1. God’s sovereignty in distributing the circumstances of this world. Land that Ammon lost to Sihon becomes Israel’s, but land that Israel loses to TP3 does not become Ammon’s. God alone holds the title deeds.

2. The many sides of sin. Is Ammon judged because she abuses Israel, or because of her pride? Yes. Sin is the expression of our sinful nature; its outward forms are many, but all stem from the root rebellion against God, and he can deal with them together.

3. The punishment suits the crime.

4. God is merciful to some of those whom he judges, and (in spite of their history) promises to restore them to the place of blessing – as he has done with us in salvation.

Constable: Some reasons for Yahweh's judgment on Ammon were her military aggression (**Jeremiah 49:1**) and her proud trust in her geographical situation and her treasures (**Jeremiah 49:4**).

II. (:7-22) ORACLE AGAINST EDOM – TRANSFORMATION FROM IMPENETRABLE ARROGANCE TO OBJECT OF HORROR – YOU CAN’T TOUCH ME

“Concerning Edom. Thus says the LORD of hosts,”

Constable: The Edomites lived to the southeast of Judah, south of Moab. The Zered River was their northern border, the Gulf of Aqabah (about 100 miles to the south) the southern, the Arabah the western, and the desert the eastern borders. The Edomites were descendants of Esau, and a long history of antagonism with the Israelites that reached back to the days of Jacob and Esau, and Israel’s wilderness wanderings, marked their relationship (cf. **Numbers 20:14-21; Judges 11:17**).

Kidner: Edom was evidently well known for two great assets: her wise men and her almost inaccessible strongholds.

A. (:7-13) Inevitable Doom

1. (:7-8) Wisdom Cannot Protect Against Impending Judgment

a. (:7) Failure of Wisdom

*“Is there no longer any wisdom in Teman?
Has good counsel been lost to the prudent?
Has their wisdom decayed?”*

Feinberg: Edom’s cardinal sin was its pride manifested in its unrelenting and violent hatred of Israel and its rejoicing in her misfortune (**Obadiah 3, 10-14**). There is no prophecy of future restoration for Edom. . . Part of God’s judgment against the Edomites was to bring them foolish and incompetent leadership. To this day, this is one way God may show His displeasure against a nation.

b. (:8) Futility of Fleeing

*“Flee away, turn back, dwell in the depths,
O inhabitants of Dedan,
For I will bring the disaster of Esau upon him
At the time I punish him.”*

Guzik: He told the Edomites to dig in deep, as a soldier does in a foxhole or trench, trying to find some shelter against the judgment to come.

2. (:9-11) Stripped Bare

a. (:9) Thorough Devastation

*“If grape gatherers came to you,
Would they not leave gleanings?
If thieves came by night,
They would destroy only until they had enough.”*

b. (:10) No Place to Hide

*“But I have stripped Esau bare,
I have uncovered his hiding places
So that he will not be able to conceal himself;
His offspring has been destroyed along with his relatives
And his neighbors, and he is no more.”*

c. (:11) Protection of the Helpless

*“Leave your orphans behind, I will keep them alive;
And let your widows trust in Me.”*

Longman: The ravaging of Edom is likened to the stripping bare of a person. Edom will be completely bare after God is through with it. Many will perish, but the last line hints that some will remain. Indeed, the remnant will be made up of the most vulnerable, the orphans and widows, who are traditionally under God’s care.

3. (:12-13) Perpetual Ruins

a. (:12) No Acquittals

“For thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, those who were not sentenced

to drink the cup will certainly drink it, and are you the one who will be completely acquitted? You will not be acquitted, but you will certainly drink it.”

b. (:13) Object of Horror

“For I have sworn by Myself,’ declares the LORD, ‘that Bozrah will become an object of horror, a reproach, a ruin and a curse; and all its cities will become perpetual ruins.”

B. (:14-18) Shocking Humiliation

1. (:14) Time to Face the Music

*“I have heard a message from the LORD,
And an envoy is sent among the nations, saying,
‘Gather yourselves together and come against her,
And rise up for battle!’”*

2. (:15-16) How the Mighty Have Fallen

a. (:15) Made Small and Despised

*“For behold, I have made you small among the nations,
Despised among men.”*

b. (:16) False Security Toppled

*“As for the terror of you,
The arrogance of your heart has deceived you,
O you who live in the clefts of the rock,
Who occupy the height of the hill.
Though you make your nest as high as an eagle’s,
I will bring you down from there,’ declares the LORD.”*

3. (:17-18) Complete Devastation

a. (:17) Object of Horror

*“Edom will become an object of horror; everyone who passes by
it will be horrified and will hiss at all its wounds.”*

b. (:18) Comparison to Sodom and Gomorrah

*“Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah with its
neighbors,’ says the LORD, ‘no one will live there, nor will a son
of man reside in it.”*

C. (:19-22) Two Ravaging Images

1. (:19) Image of Attacking Lion

*“Behold, one will come up like a lion from the thickets of the Jordan
against a perennially watered pasture; for in an instant I will make him
run away from it, and whoever is chosen I shall appoint over it. For who
is like Me, and who will summon Me into court? And who then is the
shepherd who can stand against Me?”*

2. (:20-22) Image of Attacking Eagle

a. (:20) Divinely Ordained Devastation

“Therefore hear the plan of the LORD which He has planned against Edom, and His purposes which He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: surely they will drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; surely He will make their pasture desolate because of them.”

b. (:21) Widespread Impactful Devastation

“The earth has quaked at the noise of their downfall. There is an outcry! The noise of it has been heard at the Red Sea.”

c. (:22) Sudden Terror

“Behold, He will mount up and swoop like an eagle and spread out His wings against Bozrah; and the hearts of the mighty men of Edom in that day will be like the heart of a woman in labor.”

Parunak: Summary – This oracle continues to develop the lessons that we have seen in the others:

1. If God judges his own people, whom he loves and to whose wellbeing he has pledged himself, how much more will he bring judgment on those who are not under his covenant. Implicit in all of the oracles, this is explicit here (**12**).

2. Though God’s judgment comes by the hand of his creatures, he is behind it (**13, 19b-21**). It is a grievous error to say, “That wasn’t God’s hand, because it was the hand of man.”

3. Though Edom’s conduct is hardly savory, the reason that Jer gives for her judgment is not her deeds (as in the other prophets) but her pride (**16**), as in the case of Moab and Ammon. He is most concerned with people’s tendency to trust themselves and not the Lord.

4. Last but not least, **v. 11** is a precious example of how even those who oppose the Lord find him ready to receive them, if they will only turn in faith to him.

III. (:23-27) ORACLE AGAINST DAMASCUS – PANIC ATTACK – FUTILITY OF STRONG WARRIORS AND STRONG FORTIFICATIONS

“Concerning Damascus.”

Wiersbe: The prophet Isaiah condemned Damascus, the capital of Syria (**Isa. 17**). Amos accused the Syrians of treating the people of Gilead like grain on a threshing floor (**Amos 1:3-5**). God would judge them for their inhumanity and brutality to His people.

A. (:23-24) Dread

1. (:23) Unrelenting Anxiety

*“Hamath and Arpad are put to shame,
For they have heard bad news;
They are disheartened.
There is anxiety by the sea,
It cannot be calmed.”*

2. (:24) Helpless Terror

*“Damascus has become helpless;
She has turned away to flee,
And panic has gripped her;
Distress and pangs have taken hold of her
Like a woman in childbirth.”*

Constable: The bad news was that Damascus had panicked and fled before an enemy. She would behave like a woman in childbirth, namely, fearfully and helplessly.

B. (:25) Deserted Refuge

*“How the city of praise has not been deserted,
The town of My joy!”*

MacArthur: Could be translated, “*the city of renown,*” famous due to its situation in a spacious oasis and its trade, as in **Eze 27:18**.

C. (:26) Death of Warriors

*“Therefore, her young men will fall in her streets,
And all the men of war will be silenced in that day,’ declares the LORD of
hosts.”*

D. (:27) Devastation of Strongholds

*“I will set fire to the wall of Damascus,
And it will devour the fortified towers of Ben-hadad.”*

IV. (:28-33) ORACLE AGAINST KEDAR AND HAZOR – FALSE SECURITY EXPOSED -- DEVASTATED AND PLUNDERED

*“Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of
Babylon defeated. Thus says the LORD,”*

Wiersbe: These two Arab nations were guilty of living at ease, isolating themselves from others, and manifesting pride and arrogant self-confidence (**49:31**). They didn’t need God, and they didn’t need the help of any other people! When Nebuchadnezzar arrived on the scene, they learned how foolish they had been.

Mackay: This brief poem about the desert tribes is in two strophes each of which begins with a divine summons to invaders who are to act as his instruments, “*Arise and attack*” (vv. 28, 31).

A. (:28-30) Devastated, Plundered and Uprooted

1. (:28) Devastated

*“Arise, go up to Kedar
And devastate the men of the east.”*

2. (:29) Plundered

*“They will take away their tents and their flocks;
They will carry off for themselves
Their tent curtains, all their goods and their camels,
And they will call out to one another, ‘Terror on every side!’”*

Byron Chesney: Notice that the LORD uses descriptions of things that they are known for: tents, flocks, camels, and wealth. These are all things that causes them to feel self-reliant. Much the same as people are today. Riches have a way of causing people to feel self-sufficient and you know what the Bible says:

1 Timothy 6:10 *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

3. (:30) Uprooted

*“Run away, flee! Dwell in the depths,
O inhabitants of Hazor,’ declares the LORD;
‘For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has formed a plan against you
And devised a scheme against you.’”*

B. (:31-33) Surprised, Plundered and Rendered Inhabitable

1. (:31) Surprised

*“Arise, go up against a nation which is at ease,
Which lives securely,’ declares the LORD.
‘It has no gates or bars;
They dwell alone.’”*

Mackay: The desert tribes thought themselves exempt from the conquering action of Babylon because of the scattered nature of their settlements, and the ease with which they could move away in the face of hostile forces. They were self-confident and lacking in apprehension at the events that were taking place in the world about them. To that extent their inadequate preparations made them an easier target to attack.

2. (:32) Plundered

*“Their camels will become plunder,
And their many cattle for booty,*

*And I will scatter to all the winds those who cut the corners of their hair;
And I will bring their disaster from every side,' declares the LORD."*

Constable: Their camels and cattle would become booty for the Babylonians, who would be the Lord's instrument in scattering and destroying the Arabs. One of their distinguishing features was that they rounded off the corners of their beards. Those who lived in the open air would scatter to the winds.

3. (:33) Rendered Inhabitable

*"Hazor will become a haunt of jackals,
A desolation forever;
No one will live there,
Nor will a son of man reside in it."*

V. (:34-39) ORACLE AGAINST ELAM – SOVEREIGN DOMINION OF THE LORD OF HOSTS

"That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, at the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying:"

Mackay: it represents the end of the earth as far as the prophet and his contemporaries were concerned. The basic theme is that the realm of the God of all the earth extends as far as is conceivable, and that this will be demonstrated by the judgment he brings on those who act contrary to his wishes.

A. (:35-38) Sovereign Shattering of Elam

1. (:35) Breaking Their Military Might

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts,
'Behold, I am going to break the bow of Elam,
The finest of their might.'"*

2. (:36) Scattering Their Refugees

*"I will bring upon Elam the four winds
From the four ends of heaven,
And will scatter them to all these winds;
And there will be no nation
To which the outcasts of Elam will not go."*

3. (:37) Shattering Them in Divine Anger

*"So I will shatter Elam before their enemies
And before those who seek their lives;
And I will bring calamity upon them,
Even My fierce anger,' declares the LORD,
'And I will send out the sword after them
Until I have consumed them.'"*

4. (:38) Establishing His Divine Throne

*“Then I will set My throne in Elam
And destroy out of it king and princes,
Declares the LORD.”*

B. (:39) Gracious Future Restoration of Elam

*“But it will come about in the last days
That I will restore the fortunes of Elam,
Declares the LORD.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) Where do we see arrogance and self-confidence and false security in our own country? What does this say about our prospects for future judgment?
- 2) How do we account for the severity of God’s judgments as described here as His anger lashes out against these different nations?
- 3) What factors lead a nation to live at ease with a false sense of security?
- 4) How do the eschatological references to future restoration highlight God’s grace and mercy to the entire world – not just the chosen nation of Israel?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Peter Wallace: Politics and the Kingdom of God III

These oracles are designed for the people of God. They are not sermons for the nations to hear. They are sermons for Israel to hear – for us to hear – so that we might know how to think about the surrounding nations. As we have seen, the oracle against Egypt taught us how to think about a fading superpower – perhaps how to think about a nation like the United States: “Nations, know your limits!” Egypt was a proud nation – a powerful nation – who thought that they could influence the tide of history. God tells Israel that Egypt will fall – so do not put your trust in Egypt. The nations are noisy – but they are powerless to control history.

Then last time the oracle against Moab taught us how to think of petty nations – little nations that still think too highly of themselves! Whether great or small, all nations should learn humility before the LORD God! But we also saw that the judgment against Moab included a judgment against Chemosh – the god of Moab.

Tonight, our text includes five short oracles against five small nations. The first and the last oracles include promises of salvation. The middle three only focus on judgment.

What is Israel supposed to do with this? As **Walter Brueggemann** puts it, this book “has the powerful capacity to cause us to rediscern our own situation, to experience our situation in quite new ways, and to participate in our own historical situation with new liberty and fresh passion – liberty and passion that arise in and with faithfulness. Such a text, when read critically, characteristically assaults every ‘structure of domination’ with its self-serving and misrepresenting propaganda, including our own military, technological, consumer-oriented establishment. Such a text, when read imaginatively, issues a forceful invitation to an alternative community of covenant, including a risky invitation in our own time to practices of justice, risks of compassion, and sufferings for peace.”

To put it simply: the United States of America stands under God’s judgment – and there is nothing that you can do to prevent that! As we’ll see in most of the oracles tonight, we don’t know when judgment will fall – but it will fall – and there is really no way to predict how soon that will be! It doesn’t matter how good or bad a nation is – no nation is good enough to avoid God’s common wrath. Sure, some are worse than others – but there is no guarantee that the worst will be first! Why is the United States the most powerful nation in the world? Was it because we were so good, so faithful, so righteous? No, it is because we managed to dispossess all the nations that lived on this continent, gaining access to unimaginable resources and creating such a powerful economy that no nation on earth could possibly compete with us!

1. Yahweh, Milcom, and the Ammonites (49:1-6)

a. When the Gods of the Nations Dispossess God’s People (v1-2)

The theme of **verses 1-2** is that of inheritance and dispossession. If Israel had no sons – if there was no one left to inherit the east side of the Jordan – then Ammon could have taken possession of the land. But Israel did have sons.

The context is important. In the days of Moses, Israel had dispossessed Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. And Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh settled on the east side of the Jordan. This meant that the River Arnon became the border (more or less) between Israel and the Ammonites. And there was long warfare between Israel and Ammon – since Ammon claimed all the east side of the Jordan, but Israel argued that since they had defeated Sihon and Og, they deserved to keep the land. From the time of the Judges through the post-exilic era – this border conflict continued for around a thousand years.

Think about the border conflicts today in Ireland – or the Middle East – or South Sudan, or between India and Pakistan – or between Russia and Ukraine – or many other places in the world. We often think that negotiation can resolve this. It’s simple! Just divide the land like this... But if you dig deep into the causes of border conflicts, you often find so many issues intertwined – that you throw up your hands in despair. It would take a war to resolve this! But of course, the war only adds new fuel to the fire. Once in every few generations someone dares to propose the ultimate answer: ethnic cleansing – the killing – or at least physical removal of the “other” – which will once and for all

remove the conflict! The Indian Removal Act of 1830 did this to the Cherokee and the rest of the “Five Civilized Tribes.”

The entirety of the westward expansion of this country can be summarized in this way. We said to the Indians: “We can use your land better than you can – so if you don’t sign this treaty and leave, we will make it harder and harder for you to live here, until the only option is a war that you can’t win.” Those who dispossess their neighbors – effectively stealing their land – are under the wrath and curse of God. You and I are in possession of Indian land. What should we do? Notice that God does not prescribe a system of reparations. Rather, he says that he will take care of it – by destroying the Ammonites.

b. Those Who Trust in Treasure Will Be Exiled with Their Gods (v3-5)

Part two of the oracle concerning Ammon calls for the Ammonites to lament and wail. The cities of Ammon are called to cry out. (Since Rabbah is the capital city of Ammon, the “*daughters of Rabbah*” are the cities and villages of Ammon). Ammon had trusted in her valleys – the deep ravines and almost impenetrable fortresses of the canyons. (The ancient city of Petra is in this region) But Milcom, the god of Ammon, cannot protect his people. Milcom shall go into exile with his priests and officials.

You may notice a lot of parallels with Moab from **chapter 48:7** – “*For, because you trusted in your works and your treasures, you also shall be taken; and Chemosh shall go into exile with his priests and his officials.*” Now in **49:3-4**, the same things are said of Milcom and the Ammonites. And in **verse 5**, the LORD speaks to Ammon very much in the way he spoke to Israel: **5** “*Behold, I*” God calls the Ammonites to look at him. “*I will bring terror upon you, declares the LORD God of hosts, from all who are around you, and you shall be driven out, every man straight before him, with none to gather the fugitives.*”

The gods of the nations cannot protect them – the wealth of the nations cannot protect them – the fortresses of the nations cannot protect them. Who can?

c. Milcom Will Not Save You, Yahweh Will (v6)

Milcom, the god of the Ammonites, cannot save the Ammonites. But Yahweh, the God of Israel, can – and will – save them. Yahweh – the LORD – is the God of all nations. His purposes begin with Israel – but they do not end there! God is working out his salvation – to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. But this is what he had promised to Abraham! The Tibetans may be Buddhists – and their Buddhism cannot save them – but the LORD our God is the God who will save them as well. Nations may rise and fall – and rise again! – but the rise and fall of nations is in the hand of God.

Verses 7-22 then turn to the Calamity of Esau.

2. The Calamity of Esau: The Irresistible Purposes of God (v7-22)

a. The Vanishing Wisdom of Edom: What Will You Do When God Comes?
(v7- 11)

Obadiah 8 tells us that Edom was famous for its wise men. Indeed, one of the three comforters in the book of Job was Eliphaz the Temanite – which identifies him as an Edomite. There is a sort of wisdom that exists in this world by common grace. People study the world around them and they figure out all sorts of useful ways of doing things. And this “common grace” wisdom will get you a long way in life. If you do everything just right – if you follow all of this wisdom – you will last longer than most! You might even win an Olympic gold medal! But as in the days of Job, there comes a time when this common grace wisdom falls short.

Now the Edomites face the same lesson as Job – yet without the wisdom of Job! (**verse 10**) There is but one faint glimmer of hope in this oracle. And that is found in **verse 11**: “*Leave your fatherless children; I will keep them alive; and let your widows trust in me.*” When judgment falls – when the LORD comes in judgment against Edom – the LORD calls the widows of Edom to trust in him. This reminds us of what the LORD did for the Sidonian widow in the days of Elijah. In the days of Elijah, when the Sidonian princess, Jezebel, was wreaking havoc on Israel, leading them into the worship of Baal – the LORD rescued a widow and her son from Jezebel’s home city. This is what God does. He protects the weak and the helpless. But on the other hand, God brings judgment against those who oppose him.

b. The Cup of Wrath: Who Deserves It? (v12-13)

What is the LORD saying here? Think back to **chapter 25**: In **chapter 25, verses 15-29**, Jeremiah was given the cup of God’s wrath, and he was sent to the nations: to Jerusalem first – but then to Egypt, the Philistines, Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, and several other nations – including Elam and Media. And finally he was sent to take the cup of the LORD to Babylon. Here we are told that Edom must drink the cup. “*If those who did not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, will you go unpunished?*”

There are those who do not deserve the cup of wrath. Remember Job? Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one who is like him – who does what is right and turns away from evil. Job was innocent. He did not deserve the cup of wrath. And yet he drank it. When war and destruction fall upon the earth, there are some who do not deserve it. We speak of common grace to refer to God’s gracious disposition toward all that he has made – how the rain falls on the just and the unjust – how the sun shines on all people. In the same way, we speak of common wrath to refer to God’s judgment upon all creation – the hurricane that comes against the just and the unjust – the cancer that afflicts all sorts of people, saved or unsaved alike.

Likewise, not everyone deserves the same cup of wrath. Our Shorter Catechism says that “every sin deserves God’s wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come.” But the very next question says that “some sins, in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.” That odd juxtaposition is precisely the point of **verse 12**. Not every nation deserves precisely the same amount of wrath. Some nations deserve worse punishments than others. And particularly in the light of **verse 11** -- where God promises that he will protect the

widows and orphans of all nations – we can see that God is merciful to the helpless and weak.

How should we understand this? In one sense, yes, the wages of sin is death – so everyone deserves death. And yet, not every suffering is deserved – not every affliction can be attributed to your sin.

c. The LORD Gathers the Nations against Edom (v14-16)

Verses 14-16 then echo the language of **Obadiah 1-4**. God is gathering the nations against Edom – so that Edom will be made small among the nations. It's not an exact quote from Jeremiah – but it's very close. Given its position at the beginning of Obadiah's prophecy, it is probably a loose quotation from Jeremiah that Obadiah uses to set up his vision.

d. “Who Is Like Me?” Edom Shall Become a Horror (v17-22)

In **verse 13**, the LORD says that Bozrah (a key city in Edom) will become a horror. Then in **verse 16**, the LORD says that “*the horror you inspire has deceived you.*” In **verses 17-22**, the LORD explains what this horror is like with three powerful images: First (v18):

i. Like Sodom and Gomorrah (v18)

When God says this sort of thing to Israel – we are to hear a warning to the church. But when God says this to Edom – we are to hear a warning to the nations. Now – again – remember that Jeremiah never went to Edom to preach this. This message is given to Judah – to the church. How should we think about the devastation of the nations? When you see Edom devastated by their foes, remember Sodom and Gomorrah. When you see Germany devastated after World War I, remember Sodom and Gomorrah. When you see the devastation of Iraq and Syria today, remember Sodom and Gomorrah. For that matter, when you see many of the inner cities in our own country, remember Sodom and Gomorrah.

The horror of war and famine and disease is God's judgment against the nations. In other words, whenever you see depopulation and devastation, you should remember Sodom and Gomorrah – because Sodom and Gomorrah was a picture of God's final judgment against rebellious humanity. (How should you respond to this? Yes, the nations will be horrified and will “hiss because of all its disasters,” but we do not take our cues from the nations! We respond like the LORD teaches us in **verse 11**: “*Leave your fatherless children; I will keep them alive; and let your widows trust in me.*” We respond with the compassion of our God and Savior.)

Why do I say that Israel and Judah should respond to this with compassion? Because they know how this feels! The language of judgment in these verses is language that Jerusalem has just experienced! As the exiles read and hear the book of Jeremiah being read, they hear of the experience of their neighbors in the language of their own experience of judgment. You know how it feels for your city to be turned into Sodom and Gomorrah (**Jer 23**) – so you should have compassion on your neighbors when they fall under judgment as well.

The second image in **verses 19-21** is that of a Lion devastating a sheepfold – a picture that would cause any heart to weep:

ii. Like a Lion against the Flock (**v19-21**)

Yes, it is the LORD himself who brings judgment against the nations. “*Who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me?*” No shepherd – no king – can stand before the LORD. No ruler can withstand the plans and purposes of God.

iii. Like a Woman in Labor before the Eagle (v22)

The final image is of an eagle spreading his wings against Bozrah, and the heart of the warriors of Edom becoming like the heart of a woman in labor.

3. Feeble, Fearful, and Fallen: Damascus, the City of God’s Joy (49:23-27)

Verses 23-27 speak of Damascus (the capital city of Syria). In one respect this is a very typical oracle of disaster. “*bad news*” – “*they melt in fear*” – “*she turned to flee*” – “*anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in labor.*” That’s why I titled it “**Feeble, Fearful, and Fallen.**”

But **verse 25** is the unusual verse: “*How is the famous city not forsaken, the city of my joy.*” In **Jeremiah 33**, God had said that Jerusalem would be “*to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth.*” (**33:9**) But here, Damascus is called “*the city of my joy.*” Yes, for now, God is bringing judgment against Damascus. But he will not be angry with Damascus forever. Indeed, 600 years later, before the gates of Damascus, the Lord Jesus would call the apostle Paul to himself. And 600 years after that, one of the greatest theologians in the history of the church, John of Damascus, would arise in the “*city of my joy*”! When you are tempted to think that nothing good can arise from a particular city or region, remember Damascus – remember the “*city of my joy*”!

4. “I Will Bring Calamity” – God Sends Nebuchadnezzar against Kedar and Hazor (v28-33)

Usually nomadic peoples are safe from invasion. But Nebuchadnezzar has a plan! Capture their camels – take their livestock – and they have no future. Even the nomads of the desert are not safe. There is no place where you can escape from God’s judgment.

5. “I Will Set My Throne in Elam”: The Direct Rule of God (in This Age) Means Death (v34-39)

I suspect that this is why Elam comes last in this list. All the other nations on the list are neighbors of Jerusalem. All the others had done something to Israel. All the others were enemies of Jerusalem. But Elam? Elam really hadn’t done anything to Israel. Indeed, the last time Elam was mentioned in the OT was in the days of Abraham – when Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam, made war against Sodom and Gomorrah. Back in the days of Abraham, Elam was a major power to the east of Babylon – towards Persia. But since the days of Abraham, Elam doesn’t come into the biblical story. The Elamites were still there – but they were ruled by the Babylonians – or by the Assyrians.

Historians speak of a “neo-Elamite” revival in the century before Nebuchadnezzar (under the rule of the Medes, Elam appears to have developed quite a sphere of influence along the northern part of modern Iran, Iraq, and Turkey) But rather than call them “Medes” Jeremiah uses the older name: “Elam.” Perhaps he does so in order to remind us of the days when Elam had invaded Sodom and Gomorrah! After all, Jeremiah is very interested in the Abrahamic promise of blessing to the nations!

What has Elam done to deserve this? There is no hint of why. Elam is not an enemy of Israel. Elam is just a nation – out there – far away to the east. When God’s judgment comes upon the nations it is not just the particular enemies of Israel who will be judged. All nations will fall under God’s wrath. That’s why we call it common wrath! No nation is exempt! If even Jerusalem – God’s own city – fell under God’s judgment, then all cities – all nations – will fall as well.

What can you do to prevent it? Nothing. God’s purposes for history cannot be thwarted! In many ways, this is a very standard oracle against the nations. It is very simple – with a driving rhetorical force produced by the repetition of God’s purposes: *I will break the bow... I will bring upon Elam the four winds... I will scatter them... I will terrify Elam... I will bring disaster... I will send the sword... I will set my throne in Elam and destroy their king and officials, declares the LORD.*

God refers to no agent – no “Nebuchadnezzar” who will do this – only “the four winds from the four quarters of heaven.” God will establish his own direct rule over Elam. You might think that the direct rule of God would be a good thing. But the direct rule of God – in this age – only brings judgment. After all – humanity is in rebellion. The only way that the direct rule of God can be a good thing – is if humanity is reconciled to God.

39 *“But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Elam, declares the LORD.”* There is nothing you can do to prevent God’s judgment from coming. But you know that’s God’s long-term plan – God’s eschatological plan – is to restore the fortunes of the nations. Only when God’s throne has been established – and all other claimants and usurpers have been denied – only then will the rule of God bring peace and salvation to the nations.

And in the latter days? What happened? Listen to **Acts 2:5-12** What does this mean?” Elamites. God is faithful. He does what he promises. He promised that in the latter days he would restore the fortunes of Elam – and so he did! God’s judgment is coming – on this nation, like every other. Therefore, let the compassion of God direct your path. We tend to think, “Oh no, judgment is coming – so we need to shape up!” But when you think about the judgment against the nations in **Jeremiah 49**, the proper response is: “Oh no, judgment is coming – where are the widows and orphans?” How can we imitate our gracious Savior in looking out for the weak and helpless?

Ryken: Wealth did not save the Ammonites. They were not able to buy their way out of judgment. Wisdom did not save the Edomites, nor did their military might. Fame did

not save the Arameans because God is no respecter of persons. Independence did not save the Bedouin; God found them in the wilderness and destroyed them just the same. Weapons did not save the Elamites.

Gino Geraci: Calvary South Denver – **The Lord’s Message to the Nations**

Introduction:

The final chapters of Jeremiah consist of a series of prophetic judgments against the surrounding nations of Judea and Jerusalem. In **chapter 46** we looked at the prophecy against Egypt; in **chapter 47** we looked at the prophecy against Philistia; in **chapter 48** we looked at the prophecy against Moab; now we see a series of prophecies against Ammon (**chapter 49:1-6**); against Edom (**vv.7-22**); and then against Syria or Damascus, Kedar, Elam (**vv.23-39**). In **chapters 50-51** we will look at the prophecies against Babylon (mentioned some 168 times in the book of Jeremiah). The conflicts of the past sometimes give us a window into the conflicts of the future. The Bible teaches that God will judge the world because of sin. God is in charge of History. And God is in charge of the future.

The Lord’s Message To Ammon (vv.1-6)

The Ammonites were related to the Moabites. You will remember in the book of Genesis the sad story of Lot; while fleeing Sodom his wife was turned into a pillar of salt; he and his daughters escaped into what they thought were a post-apocalyptic cave. The girls decided their father was the last man on earth; got him drunk and their offspring became the descendants known as the Moabites and the Ammonites (**Genesis 19:20-38**).

The Ammonites like the Moabites were enemies of Israel and Judah. When Assyria invaded the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.); the Ammonites took the province of Gad (good fortune) and other cities as if the Jews would never return. “*Has Israel no sons?*” The descendants of the Transjordan were Gad--Reuben--and one half of Manasseh (see **Joshua 22:1-9**).

Joshua 32--the tribe of Gad requested the territory of the Ammonites--and Moses assigned it to them, on **CONDITION** that their soldiers help the Israelites with the conquest to the west of Jordan. “*Why then does Milcom*” (may mean their king--Molech); inherit Gad? Molech was the chief deity of the Ammonites (also called Malcam, Malik, possibly Melkart). The Ammonites believed their god (deity) was stronger than the God of Israel and Judah--but the Lord knows that one day Israel will drive the Ammonites out of the land. “*Therefore behold, the days are coming,*” says the Lord, “*That I will cause to be heard an alarm of war In Rabbah of the Ammonites; It shall be a desolate mound, And her villages shall be burned with fire. Then Israel shall take possession of his inheritance,*” says the Lord.

MacArthur’s notes; Nebuchadnezzar defeated Ammon in the fifth year after the destruction of Jerusalem, around 582/581 B.C.

Rabbah (the great capital city) located at the headwaters of the river Jabbok--about 23

miles east of the Jordan. Uriah the Hitite was killed in an attack against Rabbah (2 **Sam.11:1,17**). David later took the city and forced its inhabitants into forced (slave) labor.

The modern city of Amman is the Capital of Jordan. *“Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is plundered! Cry, you daughters of Rabbah, Gird yourselves with sackcloth! Lament and run to and fro by the walls; For Milcom shall go into captivity With his priests and his princes together.”*

In **48:2** the city is called a Moabite city--(it lay on the border--whichever nation was stronger would lay claim to it). Ai (ruin)--not the city in Joshua near Bethel. Sackcloth is the clothes of mourning. *“Why do you boast in the valleys, Your flowing valley, O backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures, saying, ‘Who will come against me?’”*

What was the Ammonites boast? Their fertile valley--surrounded on three sides by mountains-- was secure. But their secure position would not be able to stop the advancing armies of Babylon. The Lord had pronounced judgment. Nothing would stop that judgment--nothing the people of Ammon trusted--could stop the invasion. The valley seems to be flowing with the blood of those killed.

“Behold, I will bring fear upon you,” Says the Lord God of hosts, “From all those who are around you; You shall be driven out, everyone headlong, And no one will gather those who wander off. But afterward I will bring back The captives of the people of Ammon,” says the Lord.

In the prophecy Jeremiah included the reason for punishment (**v.1**); the results (**vv.2-5**); and now a word of reassurance; *‘but afterward I will bring back the captives of the people of Ammon’; says the Lord.* The goodness and mercy of God promises a future restoration. A partial fulfillment seems to have taken place under Cyrus (the Persian King); but the fulfillment seems yet future--in the coming Kingdom of the Messiah.

Why does God restore the people of Ammon? Not because of their own merits--but they will share in the glories that Israel will experience when King Jesus sits on the throne of David. *“Salvation is of the Jews”* (see **Wiersbe** p. 169).

The Lord’s Message To Edom (vv.7-22)

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau--Jacob’s older brother; you remember the story of how Esau neglected his birthright and the blessing was given to Jacob (see **Gen. 25:19-34**; and also **Genesis 36**).

The Edomites were considered closer than either Ammonites or Moabites. The Edomites remained distant from their cousins the Jews--but joined them in their common desire not to be ruled by the Babylonians.

The book of Obadiah has as its theme God’s judgment on Edom; and mirrors the

prophetic pronouncements by Jeremiah. This has caused some scholars to speculate whether Obadiah borrowed from Jeremiah or Jeremiah borrowed from Obadiah (we don't really know when Obadiah was written). In the book of Obadiah a prophecy is given of the future possession of Edom by Israel (**Obadiah 1:15-22**). The people of Edom had the reputation of profound wisdom and insight (see **Job 2:11**).

Yet the smartest people in the world will not be able to think themselves out of the predicament called judgment. The people would not be able to devise a plan or strategy that would hinder the armies of Babylon and their invasion.

8 Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Dedan! For I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, The time that I will punish him. It would seem that Esau was cursed by God--for his refusal to embrace God and his punishment persisted in his offspring (see **Hebrews 12:11; 17**).

Dedan (a descendant of Ham--related to Abraham who gave his name to the territory his tribe occupied. The oasis of el-'ula--is considered the site. The expression here means the southern part of Edom.

9If grape-gatherers came to you, Would they not leave some gleaning grapes? If thieves by night, Would they not destroy until they have enough? 10But I have made Esau bare; I have uncovered his secret places, And he shall not be able to hide himself. His descendants are plundered, His brethren and his neighbors, And he is no more.

"I have made Esau bare"--a metaphor for complete harvest--where nothing is left for the gleaners; we might say "picked clean". Some have suggested that Edom--ceased with the occupation of the Roman Army--and the eventual passing of the royal offspring Herod (himself half Jewish/ half Edomite).

11Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; And let your widows trust in Me." 12For thus says the Lord: "Behold, those whose judgment was not to drink of the cup have assuredly drunk. And are you the one who will altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink of it.

"To drink the cup" is a reoccurring metaphor in the Bible; it means to drink the last drop of judgment. They drink the cup because of their pride and rebellion against the Lord (see **verse 16**).

The Jews had a covenant with God. But not the surrounding nations. *13For I have sworn by Myself," says the Lord, "that Bozrah shall become a desolation, a reproach, a waste, and a curse. And all its cities shall be perpetual wastes."* Several ancient cities shared the same name; Bozrah (fortress) fortified place, sheepfold, not Moab (**48:24**); the site might be Buseirah--about 20 miles southeast of the Dead Sea; about 35 miles north of Petra.

14I have heard a message from the Lord, And an ambassador has been sent to the

nations: “Gather together, come against her, And rise up to battle! Note: Judgment is not accidental--but the consequence of human acts and attitudes. 15“For indeed, I will make you small among nations, Despised among men. 16Your fierceness has deceived you, The pride of your heart, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, Who hold the height of the hill! Though you make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there,” says the Lord.

Your fierceness or horror has deceived you. . .the horror you inspire has deceived you. Again divine judgment comes from human conduct; “in the clefts of the rock” or the clefts of Sela--known to us as PETRA “the rose red city half as old as time”.

4 Some of the people lived in the rock city of Petra--in modern Jordan. The people thought Petra invincible. The city is impossible to get through unless you go through a narrow crack between two solid rock canyons. 17“Edom also shall be an astonishment; Everyone who goes by it will be astonished And will hiss at all its plagues. 18As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah And their neighbors,” says the Lord, “No one shall remain there, Nor shall a son of man dwell in it.

The judgment will be like Sodom and Gomorrah. For centuries the rock city of Petra was abandoned and was not rediscovered by the western world until 1812.

19“Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the floodplain of the Jordan Against the dwelling place of the strong; But I will suddenly make him run away from her. And who is a chosen man that I may appoint over her? For who is like Me? Who will arraign Me? And who is that shepherd Who will withstand Me?”

The prophet describes the armies of Nebuchadnezzar coming upon Edom like a lion coming out of the thick forest around the Jordan River. And like the lion--the prey will not be spared. “Who will arraign Me?” Who can haul God into court?

20Therefore hear the counsel of the Lord that He has taken against Edom, And His purposes that He has proposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely the least of the flock shall draw them out; Surely He shall make their dwelling places desolate with them.

MacArthur; “The weakest of the Chaldeans shall drag them away captive”.

21The earth shakes at the noise of their fall; At the cry its noise is heard at the Red Sea. (yam suf) “the sea of reeds”; the place where Israel escaped captivity. 22Behold, He shall come up and fly like the eagle, And spread His wings over Bozrah; The heart of the mighty men of Edom in that day shall be Like the heart of a woman in birth pangs. The image is of an eagle flying and so frighten the inhabitants they will be like pregnant women. We can take comfort that even in judgment God remembers mercy (**Hab.3:2**) and is willing to show compassion to widows and orphans (**Jeremiah 49:11**).

Jeremiah 49:23–27 (NKJV)

23Against Damascus. Hamath and Arpad are shamed, For they have heard bad news. They are fainthearted; There is trouble on the sea; It cannot be quiet. Damascus (alertness); three major caravan routes; the city is very old; mentioned in the time of

Abraham (**Gen.14:15**). David seized Damascus--but the city obtained its freedom during the time of Solomon (and of course Saul-Paul **Acts 9**). Damascus is not listed in the nations that drink the cup of wrath in **25:18-26**-- Hamath was a city on the Orontes River that marked the Northern boundary of Solomon's Kingdom (see **2 Chron.8:4**). Arpad (105 miles SW of modern Aleppo in Northern Syria--as well as Damascus--conquered in 605 B.C.

Wiersbe (p.171) "The Prophet Isaiah condemned Damascus, the capital of Syria (**Isa.17**). Amos accused the Syrians of treating the people of Gilead like grain on a threshing floor (**Amos 1:3-5**). God would judge them for their inhumanity and brutality to His people". . .

24Damascus has grown feeble; She turns to flee, And fear has seized her. Anguish and sorrows have taken her like a woman in labor. The Prophet Jeremiah describes Damascus as the judgment approaches; as the people hear that the army of Babylon approaches--they become weak, troubled, like the restless sea, weak and shaky like a patient--sick from head to toe; and as full of pain as woman getting ready to give birth.

25Why is the city of praise not deserted, the city of My joy? "the city of renown" famous for . . .its oasis and trade. 26Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, And all the men of war shall be cut off in that day," says the Lord of hosts. People abandon the ancient cities; and try to escape; but their best young men are killed in the streets and their fortresses are burned to the ground.

27"I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, And it shall consume the palaces of Ben-Hadad." What happened in the wall of Damascus? What happened in the palaces of Ben-Hadad? Why this is the place and palace where so much evil was plotted against Israel. The message is brief but powerful. What else must be said? What else do people need to hear to understand that God's wrath is about to fall?

The Lord's Message To Kedar And Hazor -- Arab Tribes (vv.28-33)

28Against Kedar and against the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon shall strike. Thus says the Lord: "Arise, go up to Kedar, And devastate the men of the East!

Who are these men? These are the desert people--Kedar was related to Ishmael (**Genesis 25:13**). We aren't sure of the origin of Hazor--but this is not the famous city Hazor in the plains of Northern Jezreel (see **Joshua 11**). These desert areas are east of Judah. These appear to be nomadic peoples--who lived by raising sheep and camels in the desert. When the invading armies of Nebuchadnezzar came (599-598) they lost everything.

29Their tents and their flocks they shall take away. They shall take for themselves their curtains, All their vessels and their camels; And they shall cry out to them, 'Fear is on every side!' Once again we see the phrase "fear is on every side" or we are surrounded by fear.

30“Flee, get far away! Dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Hazor!” says the Lord. “For Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has taken counsel against you, And has conceived a plan against you. 31“Arise, go up to the wealthy nation that dwells securely,” says the Lord, “Which has neither gates nor bars, Dwelling alone. Who is the wealthy nation that dwells securely? Whatever else--these two Arab nations were guilty of living a life of ease luxury; isolating themselves from others; manifesting pride and arrogant self confidence!

32Their camels shall be for booty, And the multitude of their cattle for plunder. I will scatter to all winds those in the farthest corners, And I will bring their calamity from all its sides,” says the Lord. 33“Hazor shall be a dwelling for jackals, a desolation forever; No one shall reside there, Nor son of man dwell in it.” We are given a picture of a people who don’t need God and don’t need help. But when Nebuchadnezzar arrives they quickly learn how foolish was their attitude.

The Lord’s Message To Elam (vv.34-39)

34The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet against Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, 35“Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, The foremost of their might.

Who were the Elamites? They were a Semitic people who were neighbors of the Babylonians. They are briefly mentioned in **Genesis 14:1; Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 25:25; Ezekiel 32:24; and Daniel 8:2**). Their country boundaries were located beyond the Tigris River across from Babylon, and it eventually was absorbed into the Medo-Persian Empire (God apparently gave this prophecy about 597 B.C.; during the reign of Zedekiah). The capitol of Elam (SUSA) became the residence of Darius and became the center of the Persian Empire. The Elamites were skilled archers--kind of the ancient version of sharp-shooters--deadly accurate. God promised to break their bows.

36Against Elam I will bring the four winds From the four quarters of heaven, And scatter them toward all those winds; There shall be no nations where the outcasts of Elam will not go. The Lord describes the Babylonian armies as blowing in from every direction and then blowing the Elamites in all directions (north south east west).

37For I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies And before those who seek their life. I will bring disaster upon them, My fierce anger,’ says the Lord; ‘And I will send the sword after them Until I have consumed them. 38I will set My throne in Elam, And will destroy from there the king and the princes,’ says the Lord. What does it mean; “I will set My throne in Elam.” Whenever a nation was defeated--the victor’s would set up the king’s throne in the city gate (**1:15; 39:3; 43:8-13**). This is what God promises to do--in Elam. This is God’s way of saying-- “I will let you know that I am the true and the living God.”

39‘But it shall come to pass in the latter days: I will bring back the captives of Elam,’ says the Lord.” Once again is the promise of peace and mercy and restoration. “But it shall come to pass in the latter days”. Interesting. Elam is mentioned in **Acts 2:9** among those people who participated at Pentecost. Why does God chose to restore

Egypt; Moab, Ammon, and Elam? We are not told. But in some sense--they share in God's Kingdom--they share in God's grace--the Kingdom grace.

Conclusion

By now you know the message of Jeremiah. Judgment is coming and there is no escape. We can sometimes be deceived and hardened in our own hearts. Just because the message is the same--we can sometimes deceive ourselves into thinking that message is for a long ago time to long ago people. When Jeremiah gave these messages--these were real countries, populated by real people--with a real message of judgment.

Wiersbe (pp.172-173): "Whole civilizations were wiped out because of their sins, and eventually Babylon itself was destroyed. This means that multitudes of people died and went into an eternity of darkness. God sees what the nations do, and He rewards them justly. What King Hezekiah said about the Lord needs emphasized today: "*O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth*" (**Isa. 37:16**). Joshua called Him "*The Lord of all the earth*" (**Josh. 3:11**), and both Jesus and Paul called Him "*Lord of heaven and earth*" (Luke 10:21; Acts 17:24).

Wiersbe reminds the reader that God did not give the Bible--the law--the prophecies to these nations--but he still held them accountable for the sins they committed against Him and His people (and all humanity). Because of the witness of creation and conscience they were without excuse.

Has the behavior of the nations really changed? Look at the list---abortion on demand (our country); international terrorism, genocide, child sexual assault, sexual trafficking, exploitation of people and material resources, the abuse of children etc. What will happen when the Judge of the whole earth decides to avenge the innocent and act according to his own perfect nature? "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the true and living God*" (**Heb. 10:31**).

<https://www.calvarycsd.org/sermons/jeremiah-491-39-the-lords-message-to-the-nations/>

Constable: Another difference between the oracles is that some mention the reasons for judgment but others do not. Probably the reasons for God's judgment of them all are the same, namely, failure to acknowledge His sovereignty and to live humbly by recognizing Him as the God of all the earth. He was their suzerain and they were His vassals. Other reasons were their antagonism toward His people and their brutality toward others.

TEXT: Jeremiah 50:1-46

TITLE: ORACLE REGARDING BABYLON – PART 1

BIG IDEA:

BABYLON HAS BEEN CAPTURED – THE POWERFUL PAGAN WORLD SYSTEM WILL BE DEVASTATED BY DIVINE JUDGMENT

INTRODUCTION:

In light of **Rev. 18-19**, we must view Babylon as an actual pagan nation that will ultimately be overthrown in the end times, as well as symbolical of the powerful pagan world system that will also meet its demise (both near and far fulfillment of prophecy).

Brian Bell: In scripture Babylon symbolizes “man’s worldly system” organized in opposition to God.

1.2.1. Babel (confusion) Gen.11. {Babel in Greek is Babylon}.

1.2.1.1. Founded in about 3000 BC by Nimrod.

1.2.2. Babylon is the capital city of Shinar (Gen), later to be called Chaldea.

1.2.3. Dealt w/again in the End times, esp. **Rev.17,18** where “Babylon the Great” symbolizes the anti-God system that controls the end of the world.

1.2.3.1. Babylon is both a city & a system! - Like we speak of Wall Street & Madison Ave. - They are actual streets, but also stand for the financial or advertising enterprises.

1.2.4. Note also: The city of Babylon always stands in contrast w/the city of Jerusalem!

1.2.4.1. The proud city of man, vs. the Holy city of God!

1.2.4.2. The earthly city of human splendor, opposing the heavenly city that Glorifies God!

Gregg Allen: Babylon was God's instrument of judgment. It was His "hammer" - His "battle-ax" and His "weapons of war" - which He used to break nations to pieces (**51:20-23**). But it was also a proud and arrogant instrument; and so promises in these two chapters to break His "hammer" into pieces (**50:23**). It's a reminder to us that it is God Himself who ordains all that occurs; and that all nations - even the greatest - are but a drop in a bucket to Him (**Isa. 40:15**).

At the same time, we also see clearly that - even in judgment - God does not abandon the people to whom He pledged Himself (50:4-7). They had lost their way; but they were never out of His sight or out of His care.

Mackay: Both the immediate policy prescription of submission to Babylon and the longer term prediction of the overthrow of Babylon may be integrated as parts of one scenario arising out of the Lord’s purposes for his people. That, at the end of the day, is the abiding reality; the Lord, his jurisdiction, power and purpose.

BABYLON HAS BEEN CAPTURED – THE POWERFUL PAGAN WORLD SYSTEM WILL BE DEVASTATED BY DIVINE JUDGMENT

I. (:1-10) SEPARATION OF GOD’S ELECT NATION FROM BABYLON

“The word which the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, through Jeremiah the prophet:”

Parunak: Rev. 18-19 makes extensive use of this prophecy in its description of the apostasy of the last times.

- 1) Fits well with our conclusion that the destruction of Babylon here described is still future.
- 2) Also cautions us that we should not be too eager to spiritualize Babylon into the Roman Catholic organization, though undoubtedly all ungodly religion will play an important role in that last rebellion.

H. A. Ironsides: In no other city did idolatry assume so fearful a form and so dreadful an aspect as in the great city Babylon. She was, as before pointed out, the mother of almost every heathen system. From her, too, mystical Babylon borrowed far more than many have any conception. Almost every unscriptural practice in the great Romish apostasy can be traced back to the Babylonish rites and ceremonies.

A. (:2-3) Babylon Conquered by Nation from the North

1. (:2) Shocking Capture

*“Declare and proclaim among the nations.
Proclaim it and lift up a standard.
Do not conceal it but say,
‘Babylon has been captured,
Bel has been put to shame, Marduk has been shattered;
Her images have been put to shame, her idols have been shattered.”*

Parunak: God's victory against Babylon is explicitly a defeat and shame to her idols.

Mackay: The day was going to come when the whole political order of the world would be turned upside down, and what seemed to be the abiding contours of the international landscape would be dramatically reshaped. At that time the religious beliefs of the empire would be exposed as without substantive basis.

2. (:3) Shameful Condition

“For a nation has come up against her out of the north; it will make her land an object of horror, and there will be no inhabitant in it. Both man and beast have wandered off, they have gone away!”

B. (:4-5) Chosen People Renew Everlasting Covenant Relationship

1. (:4) Reuniting of Israel and Judah in Seeking Covenant Relationship

“In those days and at that time,” declares the LORD, ‘the sons of Israel will come, both they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along

weeping as they go, and it will be the LORD their God they will seek.”

Mackay: Seeking the Lord involves turning from wicked ways and worshipping him in humility, and is the response of those who have renewed their covenant pledge of loyalty to the Lord and now desire to know his will for every aspect of their living. Those who approach the Lord in such a manner are recognized by him as his own and are blessed by him.

2. (:5) Renewal of Everlasting Covenant

*“They will ask for the way to Zion, turning their faces in its direction;
they will come that they may join themselves to the LORD in an
everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.”*

Constable: Israel has not yet experienced the changes that the New Covenant promised (e.g. **Jeremiah 32:40**). She did not enter into this covenant with God after Babylon fell to the Persians.

Mackay: Unlike the Exodus in which the people are now found, the situation that is envisaged is one that will not come to an end. Dislocation, disruption and disharmony will be permanently banished. This vision therefore combines union between the two parts of the divided peoples with repentance and genuine desire to restore their relationship with the Lord in an enduring covenant bond (**32:40**).

C. (:6-7) Israel’s History Demonstrates Vulnerability to Abuse

1. (:6) Abused by Their Spiritual Leaders Who Should Have Nurtured Them

*“My people have become lost sheep;
Their shepherds have led them astray.
They have made them turn aside on the mountains;
They have gone along from mountain to hill
And have forgotten their resting place.”*

Bad shepherds are more concerned with how they can benefit from the flock rather than how they can protect and nurture the flock under their charge.

2. (:7) Abused by Enemy Nations Who Justify Their Actions

*“All who came upon them have devoured them;
And their adversaries have said, ‘We are not guilty,
Inasmuch as they have sinned against the LORD
who is the habitation of righteousness,
Even the LORD, the hope of their fathers.’”*

Constable: Enemies had devoured these "sheep," but had rationalized their sin by saying that the Israelites deserved what they got because they had sinned against their God.

Longman: With such bad leaders, the people of God were like sheep without a

shepherd. They not only got lost but they were devoured by their enemies who acted like wolves that prey on sheep. They had wandered from their true pasture, the Lord, where the shepherds were supposed to keep them for their safety, and they were eaten. The picture of God as the pasture of the people means that he is the source of their security and the one who supplies their needs.

D. (:8-10) Command to Flee Babylon in Anticipation of Plundering Attack

1. (:8) Depart While There is Still Time

*“Wander away from the midst of Babylon
And go forth from the land of the Chaldeans;
Be also like male goats at the head of the flock.”*

Thompson: Once the sheepfold was opened the male goats would rush to leave the enclosure first. So Judah would be in the forefront of captive peoples breaking loose from Babylon to return home.

2. (:9) Devastation is Coming

*“For behold, I am going to arouse and bring up against Babylon
A horde of great nations from the land of the north,
And they will draw up their battle lines against her;
From there **she will be taken captive**.
Their arrows will be like an expert warrior
Who does not return empty-handed.”*

3. (:10) Destruction Will Be Comprehensive

*“Chaldea will become plunder;
All who plunder her will have enough,’ declares the LORD.”*

II. (:11-16) DIVINE VENGEANCE EXECUTED AGAINST BABYLON

A. (:11-13) Babylon Shamed

1. (:11) Reason: Taking Pleasure in Pillaging Israel

*“Because you are glad, because you are jubilant,
O you who pillage My heritage,
Because you skip about like a threshing heifer
And neigh like stallions,”*

Mackay: Babylon had acted with unrestrained, reckless abandon, acknowledging no limits to what they did in devastating countries they conquered.

2. (:12-13) Result: Utter Humiliation

*“Your mother will be greatly ashamed,
She who gave you birth will be humiliated.
Behold, she will be the least of the nations,
A wilderness, a parched land and a desert.
Because of the indignation of the LORD she will not be inhabited,*

*But she will be completely desolate;
Everyone who passes by Babylon will be horrified
And will hiss because of all her wounds.”*

B. (:14-16) Babylon Sacked

1. (:14) Her Offense – Why the Command to Attack Babylon?

*“Draw up your battle lines against Babylon on every side,
All you who bend the bow;
Shoot at her, do not be sparing with your arrows,
For she has sinned against the LORD.”*

2. (:15) Her Opponent – Vengeance of the Lord

*“Raise your battle cry against her on every side!
She has given herself up, her pillars have fallen,
Her walls have been torn down.
For this is the vengeance of the LORD:
Take vengeance on her;
As she has done to others, so do to her.”*

Mackay: This theological statement (re Retribution) shows that the ultimate standard of conduct is not what empires think they can get away with, but what the Lord mandates as right and appropriate. There will be a correspondence between sin and punishment (e.g. **Obad. 15; Lev. 24:19**).

3. (:16) Her Oppression

*“Cut off the sower from Babylon
And the one who wields the sickle at the time of harvest;
From before the sword of the oppressor
They will each turn back to his own people
And they will each flee to his own land.”*

Constable: The agricultural cycle would end, from sowing to reaping, because of the fighting of Babylon’s enemy. The enemy soldiers would return to their own lands when they finished their job.

III. (:17-20) HISTORY OF GOD’S RECOVERY OF HIS ELECT NATION DESPITES ITS REBELLION AND IDOLATRY

A. (:17) Israel Disciplined by Pagan Nations

“Israel is a scattered flock, the lions have driven them away. The first one who devoured him was the king of Assyria, and this last one who has broken his bones is Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.”

B. (:18) Israel Vindicated by the Punishment of Her Enemies

“Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘Behold, I am going to punish the king of Babylon and his land, just as I punished the king of

Assyria.”

C. (:19) Israel Restored to Prosperity in the Promised Land

“And I will bring Israel back to his pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan, and his desire will be satisfied in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead.”

D. (:20) Israel Pardoned at the End

“‘In those days and at that time,’ declares the LORD, ‘search will be made for the iniquity of Israel, but there will be none; and for the sins of Judah, but they will not be found; for I will pardon those whom I leave as a remnant.’”

Feinberg: This short paragraph (17-20) summarizes the biblical interpretation of Israel’s history. The sufferings of Israel are stated (v. 17), then the judgment God will bring on those who inflicted such sufferings on Israel (v. 18), next her return to her land in peace and plenty (v. 19), and, finally, the greatest blessing of all – the pardon of Israel’s iniquity (v. 20). All these will be realized in messianic times, as v. 20 declares.

IV. (:21-28) DIVINE VENGEANCE EXECUTED AGAINST BABYLON

A. (:21-22) Destruction Orchestrated by the Lord

1. (:21) Divine Command

*“Against the land of Merathaim, go up against it,
And against the inhabitants of Pekod.
Slay and utterly destroy them,’ declares the LORD,
‘And do according to all that I have commanded you.’”*

"Merathaim" means "double rebellion"

"Pekod" means "visitation"

Mackay: This presents the key to interpreting what the invading force are called on to do: they are to act under direct divine instructions. It is the Lord who controls what happens to Babylon and authorizes its overthrow.

2. (:22) Divine Destruction

*“The noise of battle is in the land,
And great destruction.”*

B. (:23-24) Trap Set by the Lord

1. (:23) Powerful Nation Reduced to Object of Derision

*“How the hammer of the whole earth
Has been cut off and broken!
How Babylon has become
An object of horror among the nations!”*

2. (:24) Babylon Captured Unawares by the Lord

*“I set a snare for you and you were also caught, O Babylon,
While you yourself were not aware;
You have been found and also seized
Because you have engaged in conflict with the LORD.”*

Constable: The Lord described Babylon as a wild animal snared in a trap, and as a thief caught unexpectedly-because she had conflicted with Him. Previously Babylon had ensnared other nations.

C. (:25-26) Weapons Unleashed by the Lord

1. (:25) Weapons of Divine Vengeance

*“The LORD has opened His armory
And has brought forth the weapons of His indignation,
For it is a work of the Lord GOD of hosts
In the land of the Chaldeans.”*

2. (:26) Complete Devastation

*“Come to her from the farthest border;
Open up her barns,
Pile her up like heaps
And utterly destroy her,
Let nothing be left to her.”*

D. (:27-28) Death and Flight as a Result of Divine Vengeance

1. (:27) Death of Strong Warriors

*“Put all her young bulls to the sword;
Let them go down to the slaughter!
Woe be upon them, for their day has come,
The time of their punishment.”*

2. (:28) Flight of Remaining Fugitives

*“There is a sound of fugitives and refugees from the land of Babylon,
To declare in Zion the vengeance of the LORD our God,
Vengeance for His temple.”*

V. (:29-32) INSUFFERABLE ARROGANCE OF BABYLON PUNISHED

A. (:29) Punishment for Arrogance Deserved

*“Summon many against Babylon,
All those who bend the bow:
Encamp against her on every side,
Let there be no escape.
Repay her according to her work;
According to all that she has done, so do to her;*

*For she has become arrogant against the LORD,
Against the Holy One of Israel.”*

Mackay: “*Defiled*” sums up the presumption and arrogance with which Babylon has behaved as a militaristic empire. In Jeremiah “*Holy One*” (*qados*) as an epithet of God occurs only here and in **51:5**, though it is very common in Isaiah. Possibly this indicates the extent to which the prophecies of the earlier prophet were in Jeremiah’s mind at this time. The term reflects the distance between the Lord and all possible competitors. He is supreme in power and ethically superior to all hypothetical deities. He is the eternal being who is the focus of Israel’s worship, and those who set themselves up against him bring doom upon themselves.

B. (:30) Punishment for Arrogance Described

*“Therefore her young men will fall in her streets,
And all her men of war will be silenced in that day,’ declares the LORD.”*

C. (:31-32) Punishment for Arrogance Destined

1. (:31) Day Has Come

*“Behold, I am against you, O arrogant one,’
Declares the Lord GOD of hosts,
‘For your day has come,
The time when I will punish you.”*

2. (:32) No Deliverer

*“The arrogant one will stumble and fall
With no one to raise him up;
And I will set fire to his cities
And it will devour all his environs.”*

VI. (:33-40) DIVINE VENGEANCE EXECUTED AGAINST BABYLON

A. (:33-34) Redeemer Executes Divine Vengeance

1. (:33) Israel Oppressed by Babylon

*“Thus says the LORD of hosts,
‘The sons of Israel are oppressed,
And the sons of Judah as well;
And all who took them captive have held them fast,
They have refused to let them go.”*

Mackay: The problem is often raised of how the Lord could here be punishing Babylon for the role she played in the fall of Jerusalem, when Jeremiah had told Zedekiah that Babylon was performing the will of God in coming against the city (**37:7-10; 38:18**). One must distinguish between God’s overruling of man’s evil intentions to work out divine purposes and the accountability of individuals and nations for their attitudes and actions.

2. (:34) Divine Redeemer Will Attack Babylon to Free His People

*“Their Redeemer is strong, the LORD of hosts is His name;
He will vigorously plead their case
So that He may bring rest to the earth,
But turmoil to the inhabitants of Babylon.”*

MacArthur: The OT concept of kinsman-redeemer included the protection of a relative’s person and property, the avenging of a relative’s murder, the purchase of alienated property, and even the marriage of his widow (cf. Lv 25:25; Nu 35:21; Ru 4:4).

Mackay: The divine designation is deliberately used to assert not only God’s willingness to act on behalf of his own, but also to indicate the resources at his disposal to ensure that his actions are effective.

B. (:35-38) Divine Vengeance Pictured as a Conquering Sword

1. (:35) Summary

*“‘A sword against the Chaldeans,’ declares the LORD,
‘And against the inhabitants of Babylon
And against her officials and her wise men!’”*

2. (:36a) Directed Against Her Priests

“A sword against the oracle priests, and they will become fools!”

3. (:36b) Directed Against Her Mighty Men

“A sword against her mighty men, and they will be shattered!”

4. (:37a) Directed Against Her Military Machine and Foreign Mercenaries

*“A sword against their horses and against their chariots
And against all the foreigners who are in the midst of her,
And they will become women!”*

5. (:37b) Directed Against Her Material Wealth

“A sword against her treasures, and they will be plundered!”

6. (:38) Directed Against Her Natural Resources on Account of Idolatry

*“A drought on her waters, and they will be dried up!
For it is a land of idols,
And they are mad over fearsome idols.”*

Alternate reading is a “sword” against her waters – to continue this same repetition of thought – just requires the changing of one vowel.

Constable: The city of Babylon depended on waterways for irrigation and agriculture, just as the whole nation relied on the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and their tributaries

and canals.

C. (:39-40) Divine Vengeance Makes Babylon Uninhabitable

*“Therefore the desert creatures will live there along with the jackals;
The ostriches also will live in it,
And it will never again be inhabited
Or dwelt in from generation to generation.
As when God overthrew Sodom
And Gomorrah with its neighbors,’ declares the LORD,
‘No man will live there,
Nor will any son of man reside in it.’”*

VII. (:41-43) AGENT OF DIVINE VENGEANCE

A. (:41) Identified as a Great Nation from the North

*“Behold, a people is coming from the north,
And a great nation and many kings
Will be aroused from the remote parts of the earth.”*

B. (:42) Characterized as Powerful, Cruel and Unstoppable

*“They seize their bow and javelin;
They are cruel and have no mercy.
Their voice roars like the sea;
And they ride on horses,
Marshalled like a man for the battle
Against you, O daughter of Babylon.”*

C. (:43) Feared by the King of Babylon

*“The king of Babylon has heard the report about them,
And his hands hang limp;
Distress has gripped him,
Agony like a woman in childbirth.”*

VIII. (:44-46) DIVINE VENGEANCE EXECUTED AGAINST BABYLON

A. (:44) Grand Incoronation of Divine Majestic Sovereignty

*“Behold, one will come up like a lion from the thicket of the Jordan to a
perennially watered pasture; for in an instant I will make them run away from
it, and whoever is chosen I will appoint over it. For who is like Me, and who will
summon Me into court? And who then is the shepherd who can stand before
Me?”*

David Guzik: There was no shepherd, no king, no leader who could stand against Him and His coming judgment.

B. (:45) Gruesome Intentions of the God of Vengeance

“Therefore hear the plan of the LORD which He has planned against Babylon, and His purposes which He has purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: surely they will drag them off, even the little ones of the flock; surely He will make their pasture desolate because of them.”

C. (:46) Global Impact of the Capture of Babylon

*“At the shout, ‘**Babylon has been seized!**’ the earth is shaken, and an outcry is heard among the nations.”*

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What should our reaction be to people who scoff at end time predictions of the doom for the world system that now stands in opposition to God’s kingdom agenda?
- 2) Why does God delay His judgment against pride and arrogance?
- 3) How will God treat His elect nation in the end times and why should we still be careful in how we treat the Jews?
- 4) What are some of the characteristics of the anti-God world system of our day?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Feinberg: It has troubled some scholars that **chapters 50-51** predict the violent destruction of Babylon, whereas its defeat by Cyrus in 539 B.C. took place without a battle and with no damage to the city. But with other predictive prophecies, if a fulfillment does not occur in one period, it is to be sought for in another and future one.

Parunak: Lessons for us:

- a) God will take vengeance for his people; thus we can afford to love our enemies.
- b) God's judgment may linger, but when it does come, it will be terrible.
- c) God's people should beware of ungodly associations, lest they catch the overflow of judgment. . .

Further Summary:

1. The root sin is pride and arrogance against the Lord. He takes personally any sin against his people.
2. He himself is the ultimate agent of judgment, though he may use human instruments.
3. When his judgment does fall, it is unprecedented in its fierceness and severity. We must flee from God's wrath and trust in Christ alone.

Parunak: Application: when we deal with God's people, we are dealing with him. We must be extremely careful.

1) **Exo 16:8**, the people thought they were complaining to Moses and Aaron, but they were murmuring against the Lord.

2) **Num 16:11**, Korah thought he was rebelling against the authoritarianism of Moses and Aaron, but he was rebelling against the Lord.

3) **1 Sam. 8:7**, the people didn't reject Samuel in asking for a king; they rejected the Lord.

4) **Acts 5:4**, Ananias and Sapphira thought they were lying to men about their gift, but they were lying to God.

5) Summary of the principle, **Luke 10:16**, the Lord's instruction to the 70: "*He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.*"

Peter Wallace: Politics and the Kingdom of God IV: The Fall of Babylon

All throughout the first 49 chapters, Jeremiah has been calling Jerusalem (and the nations) to submit to Babylon. The careful listener, however, would recognize that Jeremiah is not particularly "pro-Babylonian." Submission to Babylon is only temporary. Babylon herself is under God's judgment as well – so the days are coming when Babylon herself will be overthrown. God's people should "*seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile*" (**29:7**), but they should never confuse Babylon with Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's counsel is precisely the stance that we see in the NT in **2 Corinthians 6-7**, **Revelation 18-19**, and elsewhere. Christians should clearly distinguish between the earthly city (Babylon) and the heavenly city (Jerusalem/Zion). We can seek the peace of the city where God has placed us – but never to the point where we identify ourselves with it. Jeremiah can tell the exiles in Babylon to seek the welfare of Babylon – but they must always be ready to "*flee from the midst of Babylon...*" Do not become so attached to Babylon and its institutions – or even the institutions that you created in Babylon (while you were seeking its welfare), that you cannot walk away from them when the time comes!

In the early 19th century, Presbyterians built a network of schools and colleges. Many of the early state and private universities had Presbyterian ministers at the helm. You may recognize some of them: University of South Carolina, Princeton University, Miami University of Ohio, University of North Carolina, University of Tennessee, University of Georgia. Likewise, in many communities the Presbyterian church sponsored academies (we would call them "high schools") that prepared students for college. As states developed "common schools" – what would become the public schools of today – most Presbyterians argued that we should join with other Christians in order to control and influence the public education of the state. By the 1850s, they realized that a public education could not include much religious content. But they argued that having Christian teachers who set a Christian example would help to improve the institutions of the state.

There were even “hymnals” developed for public schools! But if you look at the content of those hymnals, it was a “lowest common denominator” religion – which meant that most of the hymns in the schools were Unitarian hymns! (Do you want to know why most of the mainline denominations in the early 20th century adopted Protestant Modernism? In part, because they had grown up singing Unitarian hymns!) Presbyterians had become too attached to their institutions – the schools they had built – the massive neo-Gothic cathedrals (largely built by the wealth and power they had amassed in industry and business). They wanted to maintain institutional power and influence in Babylon. Indeed, they seem to have largely forgotten that they lived in Babylon. They thought that America was Zion – that they were engaged in building the New Jerusalem on American soil.

Never forget that this age is Babylon. And Babylon is under the same judgment as Sodom and Gomorrah! Jesus is building the New Jerusalem. The institutions that we build – the communities that we establish in this age – are always temporary. Yes, we seek the welfare of the city where God has called us – but we never confuse Babylon with the heavenly Jerusalem!

I like the way Jake Meador put it last week: “ Francis Schaeffer recognized long before the rest of evangelicalism that the defining values of post-Christian America would be thoroughly materialistic and center around personal peace and affluence. His and Edith’s ministry at L’Abri recognized this splintering and refuted it, not by explaining Christianity to a social order that can be reconciled with the faith if we finesse it enough, but by modeling a radically different way of life to a society at odds with the faith on the most fundamental, basic levels. The hospitality of L’Abri, Francis’s way of talking about Christianity as comprehensive “*True Truth*,” the hidden art embodied by Edith’s tireless work... all these things contributed to making L’Abri a shelter of coherence in a fractured and declining world....” <https://mereorthodoxy.com/francis-schaeffer-and-christian-intellectualism/>

This is really what Jeremiah is talking about in his own day! The fractured and declining world of the Jerusalem community – a quarter of the population is in Egypt – another quarter is in Babylon – another quarter is dead – and the poorest quarter is living high off the land! (for now) But everything that Jerusalem had stood for is gone! The Davidic King – the Temple – the City – the People. What is left? What do you do when Babylon has destroyed or undermined all your institutions?

Well, remember that all of this is part of God’s plan. Babylon was God’s agent – Nebuchadnezzar was God’s servant in bringing judgment. But Babylon’s day is near! These two chapters – **Jeremiah 50-51** – provide the not-so-surprising conclusion: Babylon will fall!

Introduction: The Gods of Babylon Cannot Protect Her (v1-3)

Throughout the oracles against the nations, there has been a regular theme that the gods of the nations cannot protect them. The Assyrians and the Babylonians had scoffed at Jerusalem – saying that Yahweh could not protect them. But Jeremiah says that there

was a reason for Jerusalem's fall – Jerusalem had rebelled against the LORD. And so the LORD has judged Jerusalem. And while the gods of the nations may laugh at Israel for a moment, Yahweh will have the last laugh! In the end, *“Babylon is taken, Bel is put to shame, Merodach is dismayed.”* God forbids the worship of images. There is but one image of God – and that is Man (both male and female). The idols of the nations are vain and foolish. But all that God spoke against Jerusalem in the early chapters of Jeremiah is now spoken against Babylon!

Back at the beginning of Jeremiah's prophecy, in chapters 1-6, Jeremiah had used this sort of language about Jerusalem. *“I bring disaster from the north, and great destruction”* (4:6) This language from Jeremiah 1-6 bookends chapter 50 – If you look at the end of chapter 50 (v41-43) it is taken almost verbatim from 6:22-24. Look at **chapter 50, verses 41-43**, while I read **chapter 6, verses 22-24**.

Pretty much the only difference is that where **chapter 6** spoke of the **daughter of Zion**, **chapter 50** speaks of the **daughter of Babylon**, and where **chapter 6** says that *“we” heard the report and were helpless* – **chapter 50** says that the King of Babylon heard the report and was helpless. In other words, God will now do to Babylon what he has done to Jerusalem.

1. The Restoration of Israel and Judah (v4-20)

a. The Everlasting Covenant – The Return to Zion (v4-5)

Verses 4-5 remind us of the promise of the new covenant in **Jeremiah 31**. You might ask, what about the promise to the nations? What about the promise that all nations will be blessed? There are different ways that scripture speaks in different passages. Sometimes God speaks of the salvation of the nations. Other times there is the contrast between Jerusalem and Babylon. This is an instance of the latter. Jerusalem stands for the heavenly city – the eschatological church – the New Jerusalem that John saw coming down from heaven. Babylon stands for the earthly city – that which is opposed to God – the harlot – “Babylon the Great” that will be destroyed.

So here we are not talking about “church” and “state.” This is not the idea of “two kingdoms” – because the point of the “two kingdoms” idea is that we live in both: as citizens, we are part of the earthly kingdom, as Christians, we are part of the heavenly kingdom. But that is not Jeremiah's point. Jeremiah is saying that those who belong to God cannot become identified with Babylon. **Verses 6-7** remind us of the problem:

b. The “Lost Sheep” (Israel) Were Led Astray and Devoured (v6-7)

David was the shepherd-king. Kings were supposed to lead their people into green pastures! But the shepherds of Israel have led the people astray. And the result is that the nations have devoured them – even claiming that they are not guilty because Israel had sinned! But Israel's sin does not justify the sin of their enemies! Just because Israel had sinned – does not mean that Babylon was just. Yes, God called Babylon to bring judgment on Jerusalem – but in so doing, Babylon herself fell under God's judgment.

Just because the United States was the agent of God's judgment against Saddam

Hussein does not mean that the United States is free from guilt! We will be judged according to the measure that we have judged others.

c. Flee from Babylon (v8)

And so Jeremiah calls for the people of God to “*flee from the midst of Babylon.*” This is the same point that Paul will make to the Corinthians in **2 Cor 6:16-18**. Paul has told the Corinthians not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers – not to join in partnerships with lawlessness – not to have fellowship with darkness. “*What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.’*”

Paul quotes other passages there – but it’s the same basic point as Jeremiah. As a Christian you cannot identify yourself with the earthly city where you live. You cannot yoke yourself to the earthly city – because God’s judgment is coming against her.

d. The Arrows of the LORD against Babylon (v9-10)

That’s the point of the “d” section – **verses 9-10** – God is stirring up a gathering of great nations against Babylon, and Chaldea shall be plundered... Which brings us to the heart of Jeremiah’s message – Babylon shall be an utter desolation.

e. The Desolation of Babylon (v11-13)

From the ancient to the modern world, there is no greater insult than an insult against your mother. “*She shall be the last of the nations.*” This probably means last as in “lowest” of the nations. But there is a way in which the book of Revelation takes up the image of “last” to portray Babylon as the chronologically “last” of the nations. Every city that participates in Babylon’s sins will also participate in Babylon’s judgment.

What are the sins of Babylon? Jeremiah’s only comment here is “*plunderers of my heritage*” (v11), or “*do to her as she has done*” (v15). Babylon was the political, military, and economic superpower of the day. For decades they had battled Assyria and Egypt – until they stood alone as the dominant world-power. But that only lasted for a few decades. And then the Persians arose and over threw mighty Babylon! Today, the United States is the only superpower. And in recent decades we have seen the US throwing its weight around – much like Babylon of old. Many think that the downfall of the United States would be a great tragedy. But while we “*seek the welfare of the city*” (29:7) during our sojourn here, we do not find our identity as “Americans” – but as Christians.

Why would the decline of US power be a bad thing? Britain was once the dominant world-power. They are no longer – and I think that they are the better for it! Certainly the church in the US must flee from her identification with American power. Because there is no nation that can be compared to Zion. All nations of the earth belong fundamentally to Babylon – as the angel says to John in **Revelation 17:18**, “*the woman*

that you saw is the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth.”

d'. "Spare No Arrows" – God's Vengeance against Babylon (v14-16a)

And so God calls the archers of the world to "*spare no arrows*" against Babylon – because she has sinned against the LORD. God has said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And indeed, "*this is the vengeance of the LORD.*" Revenge is the proper word for this. "*Do to her as she has done.*"

Remember what happened to Zedekiah, the last king of Judah? In **chapter 39, verse 6**, we heard that Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes – and then put out his eyes. So the last thing that Zedekiah ever saw was the death of his little boys. Zedekiah was 32 years old at the time – so his sons couldn't be older than 10 or 12. We sang earlier in **Psalm 137**, "*O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us! Blessed shall he be who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock.*"

In one sense, the Psalmist – with Jeremiah – is crying out for someone (the Persians, perhaps) – to repay Babylon for their savage cruelty. This is not calling for a strictly literal repeat performance of what they did to us. (Just like the OT law, "an eye for an eye" did not mean that you literally gouge out the eye of someone who intentionally gouged out another man's eye). Rather this is a call for final judgment – that God would finally make all things right – as John describes Jesus in **Revelation 19:15**, "*From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*"

The description of God's judgment against Babylon in **Jeremiah 50** is exactly what **Psalm 137** is describing – with the result that (**verse 16b**):

c'. "Everyone Shall Flee to His Own Land" (v16b)

The theme of "*fleeing*" returns (**from verse 8**) – followed by the theme of the devoured sheep (**verses 6-7**), as we climb back out of our chiasm:

b'. The Hunted Sheep (Israel) Devoured by Assyria and Babylon (v17)

First the king of Assyria devoured him, and now at last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has gnawed his bones. But in the same way that the "b" section at the beginning showed forth the problem, now we start to see the solution. Yes, Israel has been hunted and devoured – with Nebuchadnezzar gnawing at his bones...

e'. Who Now Will Be Judged (v18)

But verse 18 brings the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel back to the foreground: Behold, I – look at me, God says! – I am bringing punishment against Babylon as I punished Assyria – with the result that the LORD will restore and forgive his people

a'. The Restoration and Forgiveness of Israel (v19-20)

There will be a remnant who will be forgiven. Notice that God does not say that Israel will be sinless! The reason why iniquity shall not be found – is because God will pardon the remnant! The solution to Jerusalem’s problem is not a political alliance with some powerful nation. The solution to Jerusalem’s problem is the forgiveness of sins. It would be nice to stop there. But Jeremiah doesn’t. Indeed, Jeremiah sees that the forgiveness of Israel requires another step. If God is going to forgive his people, then how can his forgiven people live? After all, if Babylon is still oppressing them – then the forgiveness of sins will not be complete. If God says “your sins are forgiven – but sorry, you’re still slave to Babylon!” that’s not very comforting! That’s like saying, “your sins are forgiven, but you’ll have to spend eternity in hell.” In order for the forgiveness of sins to have any effect – Babylon must fall. And so in verses 21-32, God summons the nations to rise up against Babylon.

2. The Summons: God’s Vengeance against Babylon (v21-32)

a. Go Up Against the Land of Double Rebellion...Because You Opposed the LORD (v21-25)

In **verse 21**, God calls his unnamed army to go up against land of double rebellion (Merathaim) and devote them to the destruction. This is the language of holy war that God had used when calling Israel to destroy the Canaanites. Now God says Babylon must fall. The reason is very simple: “because you opposed the LORD.”

b. Come Against Her...so That Israel Can Escape (v26-28)

In other words, the curse of **Psalm 137** has finally fallen on Babylon!

a’. Summon Archers...for She Has Proudly Defied the LORD (v29-32)

Verses 29-32 wrap up this part of the oracle by coming back to the theme of the archers, and repaying her according to her deeds – “*for she has proudly defied the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.*”

God has a day of vengeance against every city – every nation – that does evil. If you act like Babylon, then you shall meet the fate of Babylon.

3. So Long as Babylon Stands, the Nations Will Not Know Peace (v33-46)

Verses 33-46 begin to develop the theme of Babylon as world power 12 that will grow into the language of Revelation 18-19.

a. The Problem: Babylon Oppresses Israel – But God Will Give Rest (v33-34)

Again, the problem is stated in **verse 33**. The people of Israel are oppressed... All who took them captive have held them fast; they refuse to let them go **Verse 34** points to the solution – the LORD of hosts will plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth. So long as Babylon is oppressing God’s people, God cannot give rest to the earth. God’s purpose is to bring salvation to the ends of the earth – but so long as Babylon is interfering, God’s purposes are thwarted. The kingdom of Satan must be defeated!

b. “A Sword” – the Agents of God’s Judgment (v35-38)

And so **verses 35-38** declare that there is a sword against the inhabitants of Babylon – Why? *“For it is a land of images, and they are mad over idols.”* (**v38**) The idolatry of Babylon must be overthrown.

c. Babylon Will Become Like Sodom and Gomorrah (**v39-40**)

Many have noted that the ancient city of Babylon gradually faded away. It took a thousand years (there were even Christian bishops of Babylon!). Much of the city is now under water. God says that no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her. The U.S. army built a base on top of Babylon in 2003. (Talk about a really interesting piece of irony!) But the point is not that no one will ever sojourn in the exact location of Babylon. The point is that Babylon will never again have people. Babylon will become like Sodom and Gomorrah. That did not happen when the Persians took over. Babylon faded – but Babylon remained inhabited (at least somewhat).

The final fulfillment of this is described in **Revelation 18-19**, when Babylon is finally overthrown. John teaches us how to interpret **Jeremiah 50**. Jeremiah is not talking about a particular location in modern Iraq. Jeremiah is talking about Babylon in the same way that he talks about Jerusalem. There is a heavenly Jerusalem – and a hellish Babylon! And the two cities will remain opposed to each other throughout all of history – until God does to Babylon what he did to Sodom and Gomorrah!

b'. “A People Comes from the North” – the Agents of God’s Judgment (**v41-43**)

The comparison of Jerusalem and Babylon is heightened in **verses 41-43**. As we saw earlier, this is a quotation taken from **chapter 6** – but in **chapter 6** it applied to Jerusalem! Now it applies to Babylon! And then in **verses 44-46**, God takes the language that he had used of Edom and applies it Babylon as well!

a'. Babylon Is No More Powerful than Edom – the Earth Will Tremble before God (**v44-46**)

This is a direct quote of the oracle against Edom – now applied to Babylon. In other words – when it comes to God’s purposes, the greatest nation on earth is no more powerful than the little dinky country Babylon must fall – like Sodom and Gomorrah – so that God may give rest to the earth. The people of God may not yoke themselves to the political-economic power of the day. You can’t just “tweak” Babylon to make it “okay.”

As Jake Meador puts it: "We need to recognize that the modern western social project... is not something which can be reconciled with the faith by simply making some basic alterations to the machine. Market-backed, government-subsidized expressive individualism is the founding principle of today’s western world. And there can be no salvaging such a project... Our model, if Francis Schaeffer was right, ought to be Jeremiah, the weeping prophet who announced that there was death in the city." <https://mereorthodoxy.com/francis-schaeffer-and-christian-intellectualism/>

Yes, we must build communities and institutions. But our citizenship is in heaven – and we await from there a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself. (**Phil 3:20-21**)

Gregg Allen:

I. THE JUDGEMENT OF BABYLON (50:1-16).

A. Judgment is promised through the Medes that is described for us in **Daniel 5** (occurring in 536 BC; see **v. 3**); but the desolation described must also have later destructions in view (**vv.1-3**)

B. At the same time as He brings judgment on Babylon, God also defends His people (**vv. 4-7**).

C. The reason for God's judgment is because of the arrogance of Babylon in its task of judging the nations (**v.11**).

II. THE SCATTERING OF ISRAEL (50:17-34).

A. God reviewed the judgment He had already brought upon His people (**vv. 17**).

B. Now, He reviews His judgment on those who pridefully scattered His people; and His restoration of them to their land (**vv. 18-32**).

C. God speaks of Himself wonderfully, as Israel's Redeemer (**vv. 33-34**).

III. THE SWORD AGAINST THE CHALDEANS (50:35-46).

A. God promises judgment upon the things that the Babylonians trusted in (**vv. 35-38**).

B. God promises that it will become an uninhabited region (**vv. 39-40**).

C. God proves His greatness by bringing a greater enemy upon the great Babylonians (**vv. 41-46**).

IV. THE PEOPLE OF GOD UNFORSAKEN (51:1-23).

A. God raises up an enemy against those who are the enemies of His people; proving that His people were not forsaken (**vv. 1-5**).

B. Babylon was only a means to an end - a golden cup of wrath; but the cup is not the one that is exalted (**vv. 6-10**).

C. God now breaks His instrument of wrath by means of the Medes (**vv. 11-14**).

D. In all of this, He proves that the God of Israel is above all; and that Babylon was only His instrument of correction (**vv. 15-23**).

V. THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON COMPLETED (51:24-64).

A. God describes the judgment to come (vv. 24-32).

B. God describes the reason for the judgment (vv. 33-58).

C. God commands an act to demonstrate the finality of the judgment (vv. 59-64).

TEXT: Jeremiah 51:1-64

TITLE: ORACLE AGAINST BABYLON – PART 2

BIG IDEA:

THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON (TO POUR OUT GOD’S WRATH AND SECURE THE RELEASE OF GOD’S REMNANT) IS DESCRIBED IN A SERIES OF GRAPHIC IMAGES

INTRODUCTION:

These oracles against the nations reach their pinnacle in the scathing account of destructive judgment against Israel’s greatest adversary – the world power of Babylon.

Peter Wallace: Babylon is that power that opposes the LORD and his purposes in every age.

God reserves words of hope and relief for His oppressed remnant as He commands them to flee the coming divine vengeance and return to Jerusalem. But there is no hope or relief for Babylon. The imagery is varied and intense in its depiction of Babylon’s fall and complete desolation at the hands of enemies orchestrated by the sovereign Lord whose power cannot be questioned. The One who created the universe calls all nations to ultimate accountability and will vindicate His kingdom purposes in the selection and preservation of His remnant tribe. Succinct commands for the Jews in Babylon to flee back to Jerusalem are interspersed with the predominant intense images of judgmental destruction.

David Guzik: As in many of the predictions of Jeremiah 51, we have prophecies that were fulfilled in one sense in the conquest of Babylon not far from Jeremiah’s own time. Still, because the Babylon of Jeremiah’s day was defeated yet not utterly destroyed, the devastation predicted in these chapters will have a second and ultimate fulfillment in the last days. This is vividly described in **Revelation 17 and 18**.

THE DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON (TO POUR OUT GOD’S WRATH AND SECURE THE RELEASE OF GOD’S REMNANT) IS DESCRIBED IN A SERIES OF GRAPHIC IMAGES

I. (:1-5) DESTRUCTIVE DESTROYER

A. (:1-2) Sudden Devastation – The Winnowing

“Thus says the LORD:

‘Behold, I am going to arouse against Babylon

And against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai

The spirit of a destroyer.

I will dispatch foreigners to Babylon that they may winnow her

*And may **devastate** her land;*

For on every side they will be opposed to her

In the day of her calamity.”

Mackay: *Leb Kamai* is a cryptogram for Babylonia. (It is in fact an instance of *athbash* formed by switching the consonants of *ksdym*, “Chaldea/Babylonia” to *lbqmy*.) . . . means “*the heart of those who rise up against me*” (so NASB margin). . . . Babylon is identified as the focus of rebellion against God This note of a sudden, destructive force is taken up in the following verse in the metaphor of the destroyer coming upon Babylon like a winnowing wind.

Clarke: When the corn is trodden out with the feet of cattle, or crushed out with a heavy wheel armed with iron, with a shovel they throw it up against the wind, that the chaff and broken straw may be separated from it. This is the image used by the prophet; these people shall be trodden, crushed, and fanned by their enemies.

Parunak: Figures for the enemy:

- 1) a destroying wind that blows the houses down;
- 2) winnowers who break her and toss her to the wind;
- 3) emptiers who pour her out, as liquid from a bottle.

B. (:3-4) Indefensible Destruction – The Warring

*“Let not him who bends his bow bend it,
Nor let him rise up in his scale-armor;
So do not spare her young men;
Devote all her army to **destruction**.
They will fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans,
And pierced through in their streets.”*

Thompson: **vs. 3** seems to convey a picture of the complete inability of the defenders of Babylon to ward off the strength of the attack on Babylon. The attack would come so quickly that the Babylonians would be unable to offer resistance.

Longman: Though it will be a foreign nation (Persia) that will defeat Babylon, the oracle understands that God is the one instigating it.

C. (:5) Comfort for God’s Covenant Nation

*“For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken by his God, the LORD of hosts,
Although their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel.”*

Parunak: the twofold basis of condemnation that we have traced through all of the oracles against the nations.

- a) God has not forsaken his people. Babylon's abuse of them stirs his wrath.
- b) Their land (the land of Babylon) is full of guilt. Independently of their treatment of Israel, they are sinners against the Lord.

II. (:6-10) SHATTERED VESSEL

A. (:6) Command to Flee Babylon and God’s Vengeance

*“Flee from the midst of Babylon,
And each of you save his life!
Do not be destroyed in her punishment,
For this is the LORD’S time of vengeance;
He is going to render recompense to her.”*

Guzik: It is never good to remain in a place that is a target of God’s judgment.

Parunak: 70 years is a long time. When the opportunity to return to Jerusalem came under Cyrus, some didn't want to go back. Many had become so comfortable, they didn't want to return to a pioneer life, particularly the younger folk who had never known Judah.

B. (:7-8) Cup of God’s Wrath – Broken Beyond Repair

*“Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the LORD,
Intoxicating all the earth.
The nations have drunk of her wine;
Therefore the nations are going mad.”
Suddenly Babylon has **fallen and been broken**;
Wail over her!
Bring balm for her pain;
Perhaps she may be healed.”*

Constable: Babylon was responsible for seducing many other nations to join her in her sins. These nations had fallen under the power of Babylon and had behaved like drunkards (cf. **Revelation 18:3**). She had given the cup of God’s wrath to other nations, but now she would have to drink from it herself (cf. **Jeremiah 25:15-29**). A golden cup suggests the great wealth of Babylon.

The fall of Babylon would be sudden and final. The cup that was Babylon would break and be irreparable. People will lament over her demise, and will wish they could revive her, but will not be able to do so (cf. **Revelation 18:11-19**). Therefore, they would abandon her to her monumental judgment (cf. Numbers 13:28; Deuteronomy 1:28).

Kidner: What is special to this passage is the note of sadness over her incurable condition (**Jeremiah 51:8-9**) -- a note which chimes in with this book’s description of sin as desperate sickness [cf. **Jeremiah 46:11**], and also with the many glimpses of God’s reluctant resort to judgment when all else has failed.

C. (:9-10) Command to Forsake Babylon and Return to Jerusalem

*“We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed;
Forsake her and let us each go to his own country,
For her judgment has reached to heaven
And towers up to the very skies.
The LORD has brought about our vindication;
Come and let us recount in Zion*

The work of the LORD our God!”

III. (:11-19) CONQUERING LOCUSTS

A. (:11-14) Conquering Locusts Commanded by the Lord

*“Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers!
The LORD has aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes,
Because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it;
For it is the vengeance of the LORD, vengeance for His temple.
Lift up a signal against the walls of Babylon;
Post a strong guard,
Station sentries,
Place men in ambush!
For the LORD has both purposed and performed
What He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon.
O you who dwell by many waters,
Abundant in treasures,
Your end has come,
The measure of your end.
The LORD of hosts has sworn by Himself:
‘Surely I will fill you with a **population like locusts**,
And they will cry out with shouts of victory over you.’”*

Kidner: In view of the larger connotation of “Babylon” in **Revelation 17-18**, we are reminded that the world’s campaign against God’s living temple is equally ill-fated, its rejoicing premature, and its life-span predetermined.

John Wesley: These seem to be the prophet's words to the Babylonians, rousing them out of their security. Historians tell us that the city was fortified by walls of fifty cubits high, and two hundred cubits broad, and by a very deep and large ditch.

Longman: The Lord will avenge the destruction of his temple. . . Destructive locusts are often used as a metaphor for a destroying army (**Judg. 8:5; 7:12; Jer. 46:23; Nah. 3:15-17; Rev. 9:7**). The Lord himself takes an oath that this will happen and that the invaders will be successful.

B. (:15-19) Contrast: Power of the Creator God vs Impotence of Worthless Idols

*“It is He who made the earth by His power,
Who established the world by His wisdom,
And by His understanding He stretched out the heavens.
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.
All mankind is stupid, devoid of knowledge;
Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols,*

*For his molten images are deceitful,
And there is no breath in them.
They are worthless, a work of mockery;
In the time of their punishment they will perish.
The portion of Jacob is not like these;
For the Maker of all is He,
And of the tribe of His inheritance;
The LORD of hosts is His name.”*

The God who created all things will have no problem accomplishing this judgmental and destructive portion of His kingdom agenda.

Thompson: The particular relevance of this passage in its present context seems to be that whereas in her hour of emergency Babylon’s gods were impotent (v. 17), there was no impotence in Yahweh, who was the creator and sustainer of the universe (vv. 15-16) and had the power and the authority to carry through his purposes in the destruction of Babylon and the release of Israel, his very own “*tribe*.”

In human affairs a man’s portion was the inheritance he received from his father. It was his by legal and moral right. So Yahweh was peculiarly the proper inheritance of Israel...Israel had Yahweh as her very own possession, her *Portion*.

IV. (:20-24) SHATTERING WAR CLUB

A. (:20-23) Divine Targets for Destruction

*“He says, ‘You are **My war-club, My weapon of war;**
And with you I shatter nations,
And with you I destroy kingdoms.
With you I shatter the horse and his rider,
And with you I shatter the chariot and its rider,
And with you I shatter man and woman,
And with you I shatter old man and youth,
And with you I shatter young man and virgin,
And with you I shatter the shepherd and his flock,
And with you I shatter the farmer and his team,
And with you I shatter governors and prefects.’”*

Kidner: Everything here stresses the indiscriminate ruin that an aggressor spreads around him.

B. (:24) Divine Justification for Such Widespread Destruction

“But I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea for all their evil that they have done in Zion before your eyes,’ declares the LORD.”

V. (:25-26) BURNT OUT MOUNTAIN

A. (:25) Reversal of Fortunes

*“Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain,
Who destroys the whole earth,’ declares the LORD,
‘And I will stretch out My hand against you,
And roll you down from the crags,
And I will make you a **burnt out mountain.**”*

John Wesley: Babylon was very high for its power, and greatness, and had very high walls and towers, that it looked at a distance like an high rocky mountain. They had destroyed many people.

Parunak: Here Babylon bears the title "*destroying mountain.*" This is an unusual name, since Babylon is in a very flat area. But the title comes from **2 Kings 23:13**, where it describes a southern summit of the Mt. of Olives, to the east of Jerusalem, where Solomon set up idolatrous altars for his pagan wives. If God brings such judgment on Israel because of the influence of Jerusalem's "*destroying mountain,*" Babylon, with all its idols, must surely share the same fate.

B. (:26) Reduced to Desolation

*“They will not take from you even a stone for a corner
nor a stone for foundations,
But you will be desolate forever,’ declares the LORD.”*

Wiersbe: The city of Babylon sat on a plain, but in the sight of the nations; it was a huge destroying mountain that loomed on the horizon of history. By the time God was through with it, however, Babylon would be nothing but an extinct volcano. Nobody would even excavate the ruins to find stones to build with; the city would be deserted and desolate forever.

Constable: God would so thoroughly destroy this "mountain" that people would not be able to use any of its stones to build. People would not be able to use the splintered remains of Babylon-after God had obliterated her - to build other nations. This devastation was not the condition of Babylon after Cyrus, or any past enemy, took the city. They left it intact. Thus this must refer to a future destruction of Babylon.

VI. (:27-33) UNINHABITABLE THRESHING FLOOR

A. (:27-28) Summoning Powerful Adversaries

*“Lift up a signal in the land,
Blow a trumpet among the nations!
Consecrate the nations against her,
Summon against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz;
Appoint a marshal against her,
Bring up the horses like bristly locusts.
Consecrate the nations against her,*

*The kings of the Medes,
Their governors and all their prefects,
And every land of their dominion.”*

B. (:29) Terrifying Babylon

*“So the land quakes and writhes,
For the purposes of the LORD against Babylon stand,
To make the land of Babylon
A desolation without inhabitants.”*

C. (:30-32) Acknowledging Defeat

*“The mighty men of Babylon have ceased fighting,
They stay in the strongholds;
Their strength is exhausted,
They are becoming like women;
Their dwelling places are set on fire,
The bars of her gates are broken.
One courier runs to meet another,
And one messenger to meet another,
To tell the king of Babylon
That his city has been captured from end to end;
The fords also have been seized,
And they have burned the marshes with fire,
And the men of war are terrified.*

Constable: The strong Babylonian warriors would become exhausted, stop fighting, and retreat to their strongholds like women. Women did not normally serve as soldiers in ancient times. The enemy would set their houses on fire and would break down the gates of the city.

Thompson: In the conduct of warfare in the ancient world specially trained runners brought news from the scene of battle to the king (cf. **2 Samuel 18:19-33**). Babylon’s runners were renowned, and it was these men who came running from every direction to announce to the king that the city had fallen

D. (:33) Threshing Floor Imagery

*“For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:
‘The daughter of Babylon is **like a threshing floor**
At the time it is stamped firm;
Yet in a little while the time of harvest will come for her.’”*

VII. (:34-35) CONSUMED FEAST

A. (:34) Devoured Like a Gluttonous Meal

*“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured me and crushed me,
He has set me down like an empty vessel;*

*He has swallowed me like a monster,
He has filled his stomach with my delicacies;
He has washed me away.”*

B. (:35) Desire for Retribution

*“‘May the violence done to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon,’
The inhabitant of Zion will say;
And, ‘May my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea,’
Jerusalem will say.”*

Thompson: Nebuchadnezzar is compared with a gluttonous man devouring Jerusalem and setting her aside as one does an empty vessel whose contents have been quaffed. In a more vigorous figure still, Nebuchadnezzar is compared to a monster gulping down food, filling its belly with food that delights it and then vomiting it up. Such gluttony left torn flesh and spilt blood behind. For such unspeakable viciousness Jerusalem calls for vengeance upon her captors.

VIII. (:36-46) HEAP OF RUINS

A. (:36-39) Advocacy of the Lord in Exacting Vengeance

*“Therefore thus says the LORD,
‘Behold, I am going to plead your case
And exact full vengeance for you;
And I will dry up her sea
And make her fountain dry.
Babylon will become a **heap of ruins**, a haunt of jackals,
An object of horror and hissing, without inhabitants.
They will roar together like young lions,
They will growl like lions’ cubs.
When they become heated up, I will serve them their banquet
And make them drunk, that they may become jubilant
And may sleep a perpetual sleep
And not wake up,’ declares the LORD.*

Thompson: All this was a striking reversal of what she was formerly, a vast city, wealthy beyond reckoning, the focus of an empire, the center of Marduk-worship, with a large population both within the main city and in the extensive and prosperous surrounding area.

B. (:40-44) Object of Horror Among the Nations

*‘I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter,
Like rams together with male goats.
How Sheshak has been captured,
And the praise of the whole earth been seized!
How Babylon has become an object of horror among the nations!
The sea has come up over Babylon;*

*She has been engulfed with its tumultuous waves.
Her cities have become an **object of horror**,
A parched land and a desert,
A land in which no man lives
And through which no son of man passes.
I will punish Bel in Babylon,
And I will make what he has swallowed come out of his mouth;
And the nations will no longer stream to him.
Even the wall of Babylon has fallen down!”*

C. (:45-46) Command to God’s Remnant to Save Themselves

*“Come forth from her midst, My people,
And each of you save yourselves
From the fierce anger of the LORD.
Now so that your heart does not grow faint,
And you are not afraid at the report that will be heard in the land—
For the report will come one year,
And after that another report in another year,
And violence will be in the land
With ruler against ruler—“*

IX. (:49-51) SLAIN WARRIORS

A. (:47-49) Reversal of Fortunes

*“Therefore behold, days are coming
When I will punish the idols of Babylon;
And her whole land will be put to shame
And all **her slain** will fall in her midst.
Then heaven and earth and all that is in them
Will shout for joy over Babylon,
For the destroyers will come to her from the north,’
Declares the LORD.
‘Indeed Babylon is to fall for the slain of Israel,
As also for Babylon the slain of all the earth have fallen.”*

Longman: (:46-48) God says that Babylon’s end and the punishment of her idols is sure. And the whole earth will celebrate its fall. Why? Because the whole earth has been the object of its violence and imperialistic impulses.

B. (:50-51) Command to Depart and Look to Jerusalem Despite the Disgrace

1. (:50) Command to Depart

*“You who have escaped the sword,
Depart! Do not stay!
Remember the LORD from afar,
And let Jerusalem come to your mind.”*

2. (:51) Memory of Disgrace

*“We are ashamed because we have heard reproach;
Disgrace has covered our faces,
For aliens have entered
The holy places of the LORD’S house.”*

John Wesley: Pagans that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, are come, not to worship, but to plunder, the sanctuaries of the Lord; even into the courts of the priests and of the Israelites; yea, into the most holy place.

X. (:52-58) DESTRUCTIVE DESTROYER

A. (:52-53) How the Mighty Have Fallen

*“Therefore behold, the days are coming,’ declares the LORD,
‘When I will punish her idols,
And the mortally wounded will groan throughout her land.
Though Babylon should ascend to the heavens,
And though she should fortify her lofty stronghold,
From Me **destroyers** will come to her,’ declares the LORD.”*

Constable: No matter how heavily Babylon fortified herself, the Lord would destroy her with His appointed agents. Her attempt to ascend to heaven would prove futile (cf. **Genesis 11:1-9; Isaiah 14:12-14**). The Babylonians built ziggurats, pyramid-shaped structures with temples on top, to get as close to heaven as possible. These structures illustrate the Babylonians’ desire to get to heaven by their own works. The tower of Babel (Gr. Babylon) was probably a ziggurat.

B. (:54-56) Recompense from the Lord

*“The sound of an outcry from Babylon,
And of **great destruction** from the land of the Chaldeans!
For the LORD is going to destroy Babylon,
And He will make her loud noise vanish from her.
And their waves will roar like many waters;
The tumult of their voices sounds forth.
For **the destroyer** is coming against her, against Babylon,
And her mighty men will be captured,
Their bows are shattered;
For the LORD is a God of recompense,
He will fully repay.”*

Parunak: We hear the destruction of Babylon. Three reasons are given, in order of increasing power:

- a) **55**, she is dominated acoustically. The noise of the invading enemy is so great that it drowns out Babylon's own haughty voice. (NB: KJV "*her waves*" should be "*their waves*.")
- b) **56a**, she is dominated militarily. Her warriors are defeated and their weapons

destroyed.

c) **56b** she is dominated theologically. Translate, "*YHWH is a god of recompense: he will surely repay.*"

C. (:57) Perpetual Drunkenness and Sleep

*"I will make her princes and her wise men drunk,
Her governors, her prefects and her mighty men,
That they may sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake up,
Declares the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts."*

D. (:58) Burned Up Rubble

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts,
'The broad wall of Babylon will be completely razed
And her high gates will be set on fire;
So the peoples will toil for nothing,
And the nations become exhausted only for fire.'"*

(:59-64) POSTLUDE

A. (:59-60) Methodology of Prophetic Communication

"The message which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the grandson of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. (Now Seraiah was quartermaster.) So Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon, that is, all these words which have been written concerning Babylon."

Kidner: Seriah was the grandson of the high priest Hilkiah who had discovered the lost book of the law in Josiah's reign. He was himself the grandfather of Joshua-ben-Jozdak, the high priest at the return from exile. So the family line survived his violent death, and another branch of it would produce the great Ezra, a century hence.

B. (:61-62) Charge to Seraiah

"Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, 'As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, and say, 'You, O LORD, have promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.'"

C. (:63-64) Final Image: Babylon Sinking to the Bottom of the Euphrates

"And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.' Thus far are the words of Jeremiah."

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do you think Babylon represents in this passage?
- 2) How difficult would it be for the Jewish exiles in Babylon (who had been instructed to flee there) to now respond to a message commanding them to exit Babylon to avoid association with her judgment and return to Jerusalem?
- 3) What were the major sins of Babylon?
- 4) What lessons can we learn here about the dangers of pride in our own life?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: Israel should learn (with repeated urgings: **50:8; 51:6, 45, 50**) to abandon Babylon and return to Zion. The temptation to linger too close to the world is subtle and strong; we need to keep clearly in our mind and in the minds of the unbelievers around us that our citizenship is in heaven, and our loyalties to heaven's God.

Peter Wallace: Politics and the Kingdom of God V: The Cup, the Banquet, and the Temple

As we come toward the end of the book of Jeremiah, we see the stark contrast between Zion and Babylon. Babylon (with all the nations of the earth) is under God's judgment, and those who belong to Zion must remember that the vengeance of the LORD is coming against Babylon. Therefore, those who belong to Zion must "*flee*" from Babylon.

There are at least three different ways that this has been taken:

- 1) Some have said that Zion = Christendom, and Babylon = hostile nations – as Christianity triumphed in the Roman Empire (and beyond) it resulted in an identification of Jerusalem with Christian nations (so, for example, Eusebius identified Constantine as a new David.
- 2) Others have identified Zion as the Church, and Babylon as the State – for instance, many Anabaptists took this as saying that Christians should not be politically involved. The separatism of the Mennonites (and especially the Amish) is rooted in this understanding of the absolute contrast between Zion and Babylon.
- 3) A third model sees Zion as the city of God, and Babylon as the city of man – Augustine's formulation provides us with the best understanding of the two cities. They are formed by two different (and opposed) loves. Babylon is not exactly equal to any particular earthly city. It is rather the motive power of every earthly city – insofar as that city is hostile to God. At times Augustine can sound like Eusebius in his praise for

Christian emperors – but at other times Augustine can sound like the (later) Anabaptists in the absolute antithesis that he draws between the two cities. This is why we need to remember that Babylon is not referring to "political life" per se. No nation on earth can ever become Zion. But at the same time, as we saw this morning in **Psalm 22:27-28**, *"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you. For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations."*

Contrary to the Anabaptist position, Zion does not simply equal the church, and Babylon does not simply equal "the nations." Babylon refers to the nations insofar as they are in rebellion against God – the nations insofar as they have joined Satan's rebellion against God. This also explains why the Christian must "come out" of Babylon. The Christian may not participate in the rebellion against God. But that does not mean that the Christian must "come out" of all political involvement. Certainly we must be wary of the Babylonian spirit that pervades politics in all ages – but then again, the Babylonian spirit pervades all of society (not just politics).

How can a nation avoid the judgment of Babylon? In one sense they can't. All of humanity – and thus, all of creation – participates in Adam's sin and guilt. Only Zion can escape – because Zion is the heavenly city – the city whose founder and builder is God. But insofar as cities and nations live according to the way that God calls us to live, they will at least be spared a certain measure of judgment. If even Nebuchadnezzar can be called by God, "my servant," then surely those who seek to govern in a manner pleasing to God are better than those who don't!

The three central themes in our passage tonight – **the cup, the banquet, and the temple** – remind us that Jeremiah's point is liturgical and eschatological.

It is liturgical – because **worship** is what forms each of these two cities. The liturgies of these two cities are starkly opposed to one another. The liturgies of Babylon celebrate the glory of the earthly city. The liturgies of Zion celebrate the glory of the heavenly city.

It is eschatological – because Jeremiah is calling his hearers to see beyond what their eyes can take in. If you just look around you, it will appear that Babylon is winning. But that's only because you are not seeing the last-days purpose of God.

1. The Broken Cup: No Healing for Babylon (v1-33)

We saw last time that Babylon must fall in order for God to bring rest – not just to Israel – but to all the earth. Babylon is more than just the name of a city and a nation – **Babylon is that power that opposes the LORD and his purposes in every age**. And that is why there is no healing for Babylon. I say this because there are other passages (for instance, **Psalm 87**) which speak of the salvation of Babylon! If you think of Babylon simply as a city in modern Iraq, then there is hope for Babylon's salvation (and as I pointed out last time, there was for many years a Christian bishop of Babylon!). But if you think of Babylon as the embodiment of the city of man, then there is no healing

for Babylon.

a. “The Spirit of a Destroyer” and the Winnowing of Babylon (v1-2)

The beginning and the end of this first section (**verses 1-33**) uses the language of harvest (winnowing in **verse 2** and threshing in **verse 33**). God says that he will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon.

b. “Devote Her to Destruction”: the Guilt of Babylon (v3-5)

And in the “b” sections (**verses 3-5** and **12-24**), God calls this destroyer to devote the army of Babylon to destruction for Babylon’s guilt “*against the Holy One of Israel.*” Here in **verses 3-5**, we only see the basic statement of guilt. In **verses 12-24** we will hear the details.

But contrary to the opinion of most inhabitants of Jerusalem, “*Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the LORD of hosts.*” Yes, he brought judgment against them for their sin – but God does not forsake his people forever. Jeremiah promises us that the LORD of hosts has not forsaken his people – and he will make all things right.

c. “Flee from the Midst of Babylon” – the Vengeance of the LORD (v6)

Indeed, that is the point of the “c” sections (**verse 6** and **verses 9-11**). The LORD is bringing vengeance against Babylon. Therefore, “*Flee from the midst of Babylon.*” This is the same prophet who told the exiles – “*Seek the welfare of the city*” – even to the point of saying “*Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce...*” In other words, build and plant – participate in the life of the city. Now Jeremiah says – “*Flee from the midst of Babylon; let every one save his life!*” Do not become so attached to Babylon that you become like Lot’s wife – that your heart is drawn away by your love for the things that you have made. If you share in Babylon’s sins – if you forget the LORD your God, and if you love the creature more than the Creator – then you will fall together with Babylon!

d. Babylon Was a Golden Cup – the Madness of the Nations (v7-9a)

Indeed, the center of this opening section (**verses 7-9**), speak of Babylon as “*a golden cup*” in the LORD’s hand, making all the earth drunken. Scripture uses the language of wine – and the cup – in two ways: Wine was given by God to “gladden the heart.” Used responsibly, wine brings joy – and is a beverage of celebration and happiness. But like with everything else that God created good – wine can also be twisted to evil. Babylon – the golden cup in the LORD’s hand – has become the source of madness and drunkenness to the nations.

Think of how Revelation speaks of Babylon as a woman “*holding in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the impurities of her sexual immorality.*” (**17:4**) John tells us that “*all nations have drunk the wine of the passion of her sexuality immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have grown rich from the power of her luxurious living.*” (**18:3**)

And the voice from heaven replies in **Revelation 18:4**, “*Come out of her, my people,*

lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.”

But then at the end of **verse 8** is a curious line: *“Take balm for her pain; perhaps she may be healed. We would have healed Babylon, but she was not healed.”* I would suggest that this is the attitude cultivated by **Jeremiah 29** – “seek the welfare (the “Shalom” – the peace) of the city.” (It is also a parallel to **chapter 8, verse 22** – where Jerusalem was not healed) We would have healed Babylon – but she was not healed.

c’. “Forsake Her” – the Vengeance of the LORD for His Temple (v9b11)

And so the people of God agree with the call of **verse 6** to *“flee from the midst of Babylon.”* Let us go each to his own country. Judgment has come upon Babylon – the LORD has vindicated us! *“Come, let us declare in Zion the work of the LORD our God!” 11 “Sharpen the arrows! Take up the shields! “The LORD has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the LORD, the vengeance for his temple. And this is explained further in **verse 11**, as the people declare that God has stirred up the kings of the Medes against Babylon, and that this is the vengeance of the LORD for his temple (parallel to the point in **verse 6**). Likewise, in **verses 3-5**, we had heard the summons to battle against Babylon for her guilt. Now in **verses 12-24** we hear this fleshed out.*

b’. The Summons to War – against the Idolatry of Babylon (v12-24)

Verses 15-19 are a direct quotation from **Jeremiah 10:12-16**. In chapter 10, this was the climax of Jeremiah’s indictment of Jerusalem! It was followed by God’s declaration that he was *“slinging out the inhabitants of the land” (10:18)*, and the warning that God would make the cities of Judah a desolation.

We have heard much of the guilt of Babylon and God’s coming wrath against Babylon. Now we finally hear that the reason for God’s coming wrath upon Babylon is exactly the same reason that he judged Jerusalem – given in exactly the same words. Why does God judge Babylon? Because of their idolatry.

You can see how Jeremiah’s message – *“to the Jew first and also to the Greek”* – will influence the apostle Paul. Once Paul realizes that Jesus really was who he said he was – he immediately recognizes the implications! Paul’s argument in **Romans 1-3** is built on the foundation of what Jeremiah says here. *“For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”* (Romans 1:21-23)

And so, after using Babylon as his hammer – as his weapon to break the nations in pieces – God now repays Babylon for all the evil that they have done in Zion.

a'. "I Am Against You, O Destroying Mountain": the Harvest of Babylon (v25-33)

And so in **verses 25-33**, we hear of the end of the Destroying Mountain – the harvest of Babylon. The LORD's purposes against Babylon stand – to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant. Again, if you take this to mean the historic city of Babylon, then this took more than a thousand years. The attack of the Medes took the city with only minimal slaughter. And Babylon remained a powerful city for centuries. But God's purpose is to overthrow Babylon and all that she stands for – as he restores Zion.

And we see this more clearly in **verses 34-44**:

2. The Drunken Banquet: Babylon Deserted (v34-44)

a. Nebuchadnezzar Has Swallowed Zion (v34-35)

The opening image of this second poem is that of Nebuchadnezzar the great monster swallowing Zion alive. (I say "alive" because Zion is the one talking!)

b. The Doom of Babylon (v36-37)

In response, the LORD says in **verses 36-37** that he will take vengeance on Babylon and that he will dry up her sea and make her fountain dry. In other words, he will beach the sea monster – and leave her a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.

c. The Feast of Slaughter (v38-40)

in **verses 38-40** the LORD says that while Babylon roars like a hungry lion, he will give them a feast to make them drunk – and then while they are making merry, he will make them sleep a perpetual sleep – so that they will not wake up. This will be a feast of slaughter. The lion will become lambs for the slaughter!

b'. The Horror of Babylon (v41-43)

And so the theme of horror returns from **verse 37**. The sea monster is now drowned in its tumultuous waves. She has become a land in which no one dwells – and through which no son of man passes (echoing **chapter 50**).

a'. "I Will Take Out of His Mouth What He Has Swallowed" (v44)

And so the LORD says that he will punish Bel – the god of Babylon. "*I will take out of his mouth what he has swallowed.*" Babylon has swallowed Jerusalem – but that doesn't mean the story is over! – any more than Jonah being swallowed by the fish! – or Jesus being swallowed by the grave!

Over and over again throughout history it looks like Babylon has won! It looks as though things could not possibly get any worse! And then it does! "*We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*" (**Luke 24:21**). But now he is dead... But as Jesus would say to Cleopas and his friend, "*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?*" (**Luke 24:26**)

Right now, it sure looks like Babylon is winning in this country – and around the world. We watch as Babylon swallows our brothers and sisters alive. But from reports throughout the Muslim world, there may be more Muslim converts to Christianity in the last decade than there have been in the last millennium combined!

Think about the heavenly Jerusalem – our Mother. In **Revelation 12**, we see the heavenly Zion – the glorious woman who was attacked by the dragon. She gave birth to a male child – our Lord Jesus – and then fled into the wilderness – where she was protected by God – and by the earth itself! After the dragon failed to destroy her, we are told that the dragon went to “*make war on the rest of her children – on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*” (**12:17**) The Jerusalem that is above – she is our mother (as Paul says in Galatians 4). She cannot be defeated. She cannot be swallowed up by Babylon (or the dragon) ever again! Your mother is safe! And therefore, you are too. And that is the message of our final poem (**verses 45-58**)

3. Remembering the Temple: Vengeance Belongs to God (v45-58)

a. “Go Out of the Midst of Her” – the Fierce Anger of the LORD (v45-46)

The opening call is familiar by now: “*Go out of the midst of her, my people! Let every one save his life from the fierce anger of the LORD!*” But now the LORD says “*Let not your heart faint, and be not fearful.*” Do not be afraid of the reports that you hear of violence in the land.

b. Behold the Days Are Coming – Images Punished (v47-48)

Because the days are coming when I will punish the images of Babylon. Idolatry cannot endure. “*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her.*” (**Rev. 18:20**)

c. Remember the LORD and His Temple from Far Away (v49-51)

Idolatry must fall because idolatry slanders God and produces all sorts of human misery. “*Remember the LORD from far away, and let Jerusalem come into your mind.*” (there are echoes here of **Psalms 137** – let me not forget Jerusalem!) Remember how foreigners came into the holy places of the temple. Babylon must fall.

b’. Behold the Days Are Coming – Judgment on Images (v52-53)

And so a second time, the LORD declares that “*the days are coming*” “*when I will execute judgment on her images...*” Even if Babylon should try to mount up into heaven (like the Tower of Babel long ago), there is nothing that she can do to escape her coming judgment.

a’. The LORD Is Laying Babylon Waste (v54-58)

And so **verses 54-58** describe the final calamity upon Babylon. The images of the last two chapters are woven together – destroyers and arrows – drunkenness and sleep – the fire of God’s wrath poured out upon the City from the pits of Hell. Do not be afraid. Your mother is safe. Zion will never again be swallowed up by Babylon. And thus the

great multitude can sing: *“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality; and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”* (**Revelation 19:1-2**)

We often speak of the great wedding supper of the Lamb – but we can never forget the *“great supper of God”* in **Rev. 19:17**. If you want God to make all things right and bring salvation to Zion – then you must want to see Babylon destroyed. As our shorter catechism puts it, “In the second petition, which is, thy kingdom come, we pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed...” And the destruction of Satan’s kingdom is described in **Revelation 19:17-18** as the *“great supper of God,”* wherein the birds of the heavens gather *“to eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all men, both free and slave, both small and great”* – all those who ally with the beast – all those who prefer Babylon to Zion.

So yes, we want to see Babylon destroyed – but we also want to see as few people left in Babylon as possible! Which is why the catechism continues: “that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it and kept in it – and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.” And this is why it is so important that we live as citizens of Zion! When the church is obsessed with wealth and power and stuff and nonsense – then it is no wonder that people look at us and say “why should we join you?!” But when the church is living as a colony of heaven – as an outpost of the kingdom of God – as the place where the family of Jesus takes shape on earth – then people flee from Babylon to take refuge here!

Wicwiki: I love it when in the Psalms or when in Isaiah or here in Jeremiah they begin to declare the glory of the God of Israel, the Creator. **Francis Schaeffer** said that the time has come when we really should not just refer to God anymore, because there are so many different gods that people worship today. But we should more or less define the god that we are talking about. So rather than just saying, “Well, God,” we should say probably, “The eternal God, the Creator of the heaven and the earth.”

Then you know the One we're talking about. He's the One that we worship. He's the One that we serve. There are many gods in this world. People have submitted and yielded their lives to so many different philosophies, ideas, concepts which are their gods. And we hear the universalists declaring, “Well, all roads lead to God. You know it doesn't really matter if you're a Buddhist or a Mohammed. All roads lead to God.” Sure, to some god. But they don't lead to the eternal God who created the heaven and the earth. There's only one road that leads to Him. That road is by way of the cross of Jesus Christ. And that cross declares to you there's only one road to Him. Jesus said, *“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me: nevertheless not My will, Thy will be done”* (**Matthew 26:39**).

TEXT: Jeremiah 52:1-34

TITLE: FALL OF JERUSALEM – “I TOLD YOU SO!”

BIG IDEA:

PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM VINDICATES THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD AND THE ACCURATE PREDICTIONS OF JEREMIAH

INTRODUCTION:

This final chapter of the book of Jeremiah is apparently appended by another editor. Jeremiah’s own lament over the sad plight of God’s Holy City will be recorded next in the book of Lamentations. But here we see the unvarnished historical record of what actually happened to the city of Jerusalem and its inhabitants as viewed against the backdrop of the unpopular prophecies uttered by God’s faithful mouthpiece. The sovereignty of God and divine accountability will not allow for God’s elect nation to escape her deserved punishment – even at the hands of such a pagan world power as Babylon.

Longman: By placing the description of the fall of Jerusalem after the oracles against the foreign nations and as last in the canonical book, the editor reminds the reader of what is of first order importance in the book. Yes, Babylon and the other foreign nations will get what they deserve, but Judah deserves its punishment as well. The description of the fall of Jerusalem also is a way of showing how Jeremiah’s earlier prophetic words did come to pass. It is Jeremiah not the false prophets who spoke the truth.

Ryken: The scribe who wrote the epilogue to Jeremiah had a historian’s eye for detail. He did not shed any tears for Jerusalem. He simply reported how the city was captured. He did not tell how he felt – he just told what happened. His report was that when Jerusalem fell in the year 586 B.C., it was dethroned (52:1-11), demolished (vv. 12-16), desecrated (vv. 17-23), and depopulated (vv. 24-30).

PROPHETIC FULFILLMENT OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM VINDICATES THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT OF GOD AND THE ACCURATE PREDICTIONS OF JEREMIAH

I. (:1-27) ZEDEKIAH’S AND JERUSALEM’S SUBJUGATION TO BABYLON – JEREMIAH’S PROPHECIES WERE FULFILLED

A. (:1-11) Jerusalem Dethroned

1. (:1-3) Rebellion of Evil King Zedekiah

a. (:1) Introduction to Zedekiah

“Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah.”

This is a different Jeremiah than the author of the book.

Constable: Zedekiah (Mattaniah, **2 Kings 24:17**) was the last king of the Davidic dynasty to rule over Judah from Jerusalem. He was 21 years old when he began reigning in 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar selected him to rule after Zedekiah's nephew Jehoiachin proved unfaithful (**2 Kings 24:17**). Zedekiah ruled as Nebuchadnezzar's vassal for 11 years, until the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. His mother, the queen mother, was Hamutal, the daughter of a certain Jeremiah of Libnah. "Queen mothers" exercised considerable authority, and enjoyed great prestige in ancient Near Eastern countries, which accounts for Hamutal's mention here (cf. **Jeremiah 13:18**).

b. (:2) Characterization of Zedekiah

"He did evil in the sight of the LORD like all that Jehoiakim had done."

c. (:3a) Divine Reaction

"For through the anger of the LORD this came about in Jerusalem and Judah until He cast them out from His presence."

d. (:3b) Political Suicide

"And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon."

Constable: The Lord brought hardships on Judah and Jerusalem - during Jehoiakim's evil reign, because of Judah's iniquity - until He sent the king out of His presence into Babylon (cf. **2 Chronicles 36:3**). To compound Judah's troubles further, Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar sometime before 588 B.C, the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign (**2 Kings 24:20**). Because God wanted Zedekiah to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah's rebellion was more significantly against Yahweh.

Longman: The text abruptly and briefly announces that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. This certainly entailed the cessation of tribute payments and perhaps the expulsion of Babylonian agents in Jerusalem, but we are not told this explicitly. Nor are we told why Zedekiah rebelled. Something must have signaled to him that it was possible to succeed in such a rebellion, but we are not told what that was.

2. (:4-5) Reaction From King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon

"Now it came about in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, camped against it and built a siege wall all around it. So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah."

MacArthur: This narrative rehearses the account of the fall of Jerusalem. So crucial was this event that the OT records it 4 times (see also **39:1-14; 2Ki 25; 2Ch 36:11-21**).

Thompson: Such works included siege walls, encampments, engines of war like battering rams, and mobile towers from which missiles or burning tar could be hurled.

3. (:6-7) Retreat After Defeat

a. (:6) Severe Famine

“On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.”

b. (:7) Stronghold Broken

“Then the city was broken into, and all the men of war fled and went forth from the city at night by way of the gate between the two walls which was by the king’s garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah.”

4. (:8-11) Retribution Against Zedekiah

a. (:8-9) Pursuit and Capture of Zedekiah

“But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, and he passed sentence on him.”

Byron Chesney: Nebuchadnezzar had invaded the king’s palace and taken his sons as prisoners. Zedekiah is only 32 years old at this time so his sons would have been very young, some may have been infants. He had to stand there and watch as Nebuchadnezzar put all of his sons and princes to death. What a horrible thing.

b. (:10-11) Punishment of Zedekiah and the Royal Family

“The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and he also slaughtered all the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he blinded the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him with bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon and put him in prison until the day of his death.”

B. (:12-16) Jerusalem Demolished

1. (:12) Captain of the Babylonian Invading Forces Introduced

“Now on the tenth day of the fifth month, which was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard, who was in the service of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem.”

Byron Chesney: We are told again about Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard for the Chaldean Army. He was Nebuchadnezzar’s chief executioner. I affectionately nicknamed him “The Butcher of Babylon.” He, along with his army of soldiers, went on a rampage of mayhem, murder, and madness. They resorted to one of the greatest weapons of all time, Fire. Fire is a destroyer. What it doesn’t burn down it turns black

and unusable. That was the whole intention of the Chaldeans, to render Jerusalem unusable.

2. (:13-14) Campaigns of Destruction Against the Temple and the City

a. (:13) Burning Campaign

“He burned the house of the LORD, the king’s house and all the houses of Jerusalem; even every large house he burned with fire.”

b. (:14) Demolition Campaign

“So all the army of the Chaldeans who were with the captain of the guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.”

3. (:15-16) Commandeering of the Refugees

a. (:15) Some Taken Into Exile

“Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away into exile some of the poorest of the people, the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon and the rest of the artisans.”

b. (:16) Some Left to Work the Land

“But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.”

C. (:17-23) Jerusalem Desecrated

1. (:17-19) Pillaging the Temple

a. (:17) Bronze Pillars

“Now the bronze pillars which belonged to the house of the LORD and the stands and the bronze sea, which were in the house of the LORD, the Chaldeans broke in pieces and carried all their bronze to Babylon.”

Byron Chesney: You can’t imagine what this must have been like for the Jews to witness. The Temple is the holiest of all places on earth. These pagan Gentiles were defiling the Temple just by being in it. They displayed utter contempt for the Jews by destroying and stealing the things out of the Temple of God.

b. (:18) Bronze Vessels

“They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the pans and all the bronze vessels which were used in temple service.”

Constable: The Chaldeans broke up and took to Babylon the bronze pillars at the entrance to the temple (**1 Kings 7:15-22**), the wheeled stands for the priests to wash their tools in (**1 Kings 7:27-36**), the sea (reservoir) for the water in the courtyard with which the priests washed themselves (**1 Kings 7:23-26; 2 Chronicles 4:6**), and the

utensils used in the temple service (**1 Kings 7:40; 1 Kings 7:45**). The sea was about 15 feet in diameter, seven and a half feet high, and three inches thick. The wheeled stands and their bowls carried about 104 gallons of water each. Thus the amount of bronze in these items was considerable.

c. (:19) Gold and Silver Items

“The captain of the guard also took away the bowls, the firepans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the pans and the drink offering bowls, what was fine gold and what was fine silver.”

Constable: Jeremiah had predicted that the Babylonians would take the remaining furnishings in the temple to Babylon (**Jeremiah 27:19-22**), but the false prophet Hananiah had promised that the furnishings already taken would be returned (**Jeremiah 28:3**). Jeremiah was right.

2. (:20-23) Pilfering Huge Bronze Items of Special Significance

a. (:20) Pillars and Bronze Bulls

“The two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the sea, and the stands, which King Solomon had made for the house of the LORD—the bronze of all these vessels was beyond weight.”

b. (:21-23) Pomegranates

“As for the pillars, the height of each pillar was eighteen cubits, and it was twelve cubits in circumference and four fingers in thickness, and hollow. Now a capital of bronze was on it; and the height of each capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates upon the capital all around, all of bronze. And the second pillar was like these, including pomegranates. There were ninety-six exposed pomegranates; all the pomegranates numbered a hundred on the network all around.”

D. (:24-30) Jerusalem Depopulated

1. (:24-27) Key Officials Exiled and Executed

a. (:24) Priests and Temple Officials Targeted

“Then the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest, with the three officers of the temple.”

b. (:25) Military and Political Officials Targeted

“He also took from the city one official who was overseer of the men of war, and seven of the king’s advisers who were found in the city, and the scribe of the commander of the army who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men of the people of the land who were found in the midst of the city.”

- c. (:26) Destination = Riblah
“Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah.”
- d. (:27) Death by Execution
“Then the king of Babylon struck them down and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was led away into exile from its land.”

MacArthur: Babylon executed some Judean leaders as an act of power, of resentment over the 18 month resistance (cf. **52:4-6**), and of intimidation to prevent future plots.

2. (:28-30) Numbering of the Exiles in 3 Stages of Deportation

*“These are the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away into exile:
 in the seventh year 3,023 Jews;
 in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar 832 persons from Jerusalem;
 in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile 745 Jewish people;
 there were 4,600 persons in all.”*

Parunak: These numbers cannot represent the main body of the people. **2 Kings 24:12ff** shows that 10K were taken captive with J'chin alone, and the writer here, quoting adjacent parts of **2 Kings 24**, can hardly be ignorant of these numbers. Perhaps the reference is to adult men here, and total population in **2 Kings**.

II. (:31-34) JEHOIACHIN'S FAVORABLE TREATMENT IN BABYLON – HOPE REMAINS FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Constable: This section is an almost verbatim repetition of **2 Kings 25:27-30**. It closes the book on a note of hope.

Thompson: There is considerable theological significance in these four verses. The fact that Jehoiachin lived on long after the exile and that he was finally released from prison may have seemed like the first signs of the fulfilment of Jeremiah's promise of a day of restoration. To the last, the future of Israel is seen as lying with the exiles in Babylon and not with those in Egypt or in their old homeland.

A. (:31) Prison Release

“Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, showed favor to Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison.”

Kidner: The disproportion between three months and thirty-seven years highlights the injustice of a system that fails to respect the biblical criteria: first the factual, retrospective proviso, “If it is true and certain that such . . . has been done”, and secondly the retributive principle, “if the guilty man deserves . . .”

B. (:32) Power Respected

“Then he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon.”

C. (:33-34) Provision Received

1. (:33) Royal Treatment

“So Jehoiachin changed his prison clothes, and had his meals in the king’s presence regularly all the days of his life.”

Adam Clarke: That is, Jehoiachin changed his own garments, that he might be suited in that respect to the state of his elevation. Kings also, in token of favor, gave caftans or robes to those whom they wish to honor.

2. (:34) Daily Allowance

“For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, a daily portion all the days of his life until the day of his death.”

Kidner: So the historical appendix to the book is not the anticlimax that it might have seemed to be. Its tragic record shows the sober truth of Jeremiah’s warnings, proving them to be anything but the “jeremiads” of a pessimist. But the closing paragraph, too, bears out his message, which looked beyond captivity to restoration, of which this royal gesture was a divinely prompted foretaste.

* * * * *

DEVOTIONAL QUESTIONS:

- 1) What do we learn in these final chapters about accountability before the judge of all the earth?
- 2) How does this record of the specific fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecies provide assurance for us regarding the fulfillment of those prophecies still future related to the Second Coming and the Messianic Kingdom?
- 3) Why doesn’t the Lord step in sooner and intervene in judgment when His holy temple is being desecrated and his people are being abused?
- 4) What helps you to keep your focus on the promises of God despite the hardship of your present circumstances?

* * * * *

QUOTES FOR REFLECTION:

Parunak: These vignettes of prophecy fulfilled and yet to be fulfilled may have a further point. Like the promises to Zed and J'chin, the book as a whole has near-term and far-term promises. The near-term promises concern the fall of Jerusalem; these are fulfilled. The far-term promises, notably 30-33, still lie ahead. By showing us the first part but not the second of the prophecies of these two kings, Jer reminds us that the fall of Jerusalem realizes part, but not all, of what God promised him. And by showing us how incongruent the short-term and long-term outcomes are for the two kings, he reminds us that the darkness of Judah's night of captivity will be overwhelmed by the glory of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom in the age to come.

Michael Leach: Jerusalem Has Fallen

3 scenes Vv. 4-16 = 39:1-10

I. THE CITY IS CAPTURED! 1-11

- A. THE RECOGNIZABLE PATTERN 1-6
- B. THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT 7-9
- C. THE RUTHLESS PUNISHMENT 10-11

II. THE TEMPLE IS BURNED! 12-23

- A. THE STRATEGIC DOMINATION 12-16
- B. THE SYSTEMATIC DESTRUCTION 17-20
- C. THE SEVERE DEVOTION 21-23

III. THE PEOPLE ARE EXILED! 24-30

- A. THE CONSCIOUS ROUNDUP 24-25
- B. THE CRUEL RETALIATION 26-27
- C. THE COMPLETED REMOVAL 28-30

Peter Wallace: Babylon and Jerusalem

2. Remembering the King, the Temple, and the People (52:1-30)

The rest of the chapter will deal with the contingencies of history. But the opening three verses set forth the theological reason for human events.

a. The Siege of Jerusalem and the Fall of Zedekiah (v1-11)

God rules over all the affairs of men. **Verse 3** makes it clear that all that follows happens because of God's anger. God will use the folly of Zedekiah to lead his holy city into destruction. Notice that every event is dated to the day. The memory of the exile of Jerusalem is so vivid that it remains etched in the calendar of the people of God. You cannot read this passage without great horror and dread. The relentless anger of God against his rebellious people is a terrifying read.

God had promised to make his name dwell in Jerusalem forever. God had promised that the throne of David would endure forever. God had promised that the house of Aaron

would serve before him forever. And now God is destroying Jerusalem, breaking down the temple, and removing the houses of David and Aaron from his presence. It almost makes you wonder whether God really is faithful to his promises!

This is why it is important to remember that God's promises have both an unconditional side and a conditional side. Israel has failed to keep covenant with God. The house of David has failed to keep covenant with God. The house of Aaron has failed to keep covenant with God. Therefore, God brings his judgment against them.

This is why Jesus is so important! Jesus is the place where God's name dwells. Jesus is the son of David who sits at God's right hand forever. Jesus is the faithful high priest who serve before God forever. As we go through the chapter, we need to see Jesus as the one who endures this exiling wrath of God on our behalf. This is what God did to Jesus.

Nebuchadnezzar was tired of this pesky city Jerusalem that kept rebelling against him, so he besieged the city for two years, until there was no more food in the city. And Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

(vv. 4-11) This passage has already appeared earlier in **Jeremiah 39**. Why would Babylon expend such energy and resources in capturing Jerusalem – a small provincial city in the hill country? “*Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*” With such a far-flung empire – with so many little client states all over the middle east, Babylon could not afford to allow one of these little cities to rebel.

Jerusalem was not an especially valuable prize – but the hill country of Judah sits next to one of the most prized trade routes in the ancient world – along the coast of the Mediterranean. Judean raiders could harass trade caravans and disappear into the hills. The small Judean army could make it impossible for Babylon to move anything but large armies through the region. When a breach was made in the wall of the city, the men of war tried to escape, but they (and the king) were captured near Jericho. In the same place where Israel came into the land, Israel will be put out of the land.

They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and the death of his sons was the last thing that he ever saw and they put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon. Samson had been blinded and taken captive. And as Samson went, so goes Israel indeed, so goes the house of David. But where Samson went out with a bang – the house of David goes out with a whimper! Blind and captive, Zedekiah is taken away for judgment and is never heard of again. He is simply put in prison “*until the day of his death.*”

b. The Destruction of the Temple (v12-23)

Verses 12-23 then tell the story of the destruction of the temple. The house of the LORD, the king's house, all the houses of Jerusalem – every great house – burned with fire. With their shield and protector blind and captive, the city of God lies open to the depredations of the Babylonians. And so Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard of

Nebuchadnezzar, burned the house of the LORD and the king's house.

The house of the LORD and the king's house had been designed in parallel, each with three parts, as a way of showing how the LORD's temple and the LORD's king were connected in the city of God. Connected in life, connected in worship, they are now connected in exile, death and destruction. Indeed, every great house was burned down. The wall of the city was torn down, and all the people were carried into exile except the very poorest of the poor. Notice that even those who had deserted to the Babylonians are carried away. It didn't matter whether you remained faithful to Zedekiah or whether you turned tail and ran away! Everyone who survived was sent into exile.

The bronze, silver, and gold were taken away. Much of the silver and gold had already been sent away in tribute to Assyria and Babylon in the past. This seizure of the temple furniture has been called the “Good Friday” of the temple (Brueggeman, 491). The gold of the temple had already been stripped off and sent away. All that is left of value in the temple are the pillars of bronze, and the bronze sea (and a few bronze vessels). Only a little gold and silver is mentioned here. The huge bronze pillars and bronze sea were now broken in pieces and carted off. The two pillars, Jachin and Boaz, had represented the royal and priestly guardians of the house. The sea had represented the living water that flowed from the temple to the nations. Years before Ahaz had removed the water chariots. The living water no longer flowed to the nations from the temple. If Israel no longer brings living water to the nations, then Israel will not live long either.

c. The Exile of the People (v24-30)

So Judah was taken into exile out of its land. The top two priests, three keepers of the threshold, the commanding officer of the city, along with seven men from the king's council, the secretary of the commander of the army, and 60 men of the people. That's 74 men altogether. **2 Kings 25** says that they took 5 men of the king's council. Thereby bringing the total to 72. Why the difference?

In **Exodus 24**, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel went up the mountain. And in the very next chapter, the LORD told Moses to build the tabernacle. Now immediately after destroying the temple, Babylon strikes down 74 elders of Israel. From Babylon's perspective, they are seeking to destroy any possible future rebellion, by removing the leadership that might rebel. But unwittingly they are also giving a symbolic blow to the priests and elders who stood in the place of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the 70 elders at Sinai. The point is that the king is dead, the temple is destroyed, the sacrifices are no more, Jerusalem is in ruins. Everything that Israel had trusted is no more. Or to put it a better way: everything that God had given them as means of grace is gone. Because these were all good things. The son of David, the temple of Yahweh, the city of God, these things were all good and wonderful gifts from God. But the people of God forgot. They forgot their creator, and worshiped the creature. They forgot the giver and worshiped the gift. They put their hope in the temple, rather than in the God who gave them the temple.

You and I do this all the time! God has given us good gifts. He has given us homes and

families, abilities, talents, things that we are good at. And we, like our fathers, have put our hope in those things. Beware, because God has been known to strip away those gifts from those who worship the creature instead of worshipping him!

Mary Rowlandson, the wife of a Puritan pastor in New England in the 17th century, spoke of this when she was captured by Indians. She recognized that God had sent her into a sort of exile. She then began to see how many ways she had forgotten God. God may at times allow us to experience the horror of exile feeling the absence of God for a season. But he does this to us as he did to Israel of old in mercy, humbling us for a season, so that he might renew us in grace. And the key for us, as it was for Israel of old, is to remember his mercy and promises even in the very moment when it looks like God has forgotten us.

Verses 28-30 provide a summary of the deportations: This is a striking account. Nowhere else are we given the numbers of all the deportations. In **2 Kings 24**, we are told that Nebuchadnezzar took captive 18,000 men to Babylon in his eighth year. So we know that there were many more who went to Babylon. We are told in Ezra that there were 42,360 who returned from Babylon (along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers).

This reminds us that there are lots of unanswered questions in these statistics. For instance, do they include women and children? If Ezra's numbers are as precise and accurate as they appear, then we need to see the Babylonian exile a little differently. But what is the point of this text?! After all, this text says that the great exile of 587 – the exile of the 18th year – took only 832 persons – (and then after Gedaliah's assassination, he took another 745 persons).

When we went through the book of Chronicles, we saw that the Chronicler regularly exaggerates numbers in order to make theological points. In the same way, Jeremiah uses understated numbers to make theological points. Jerusalem is so small – so frail – so weak – because Jerusalem has not trusted in her God. The point here in Jeremiah is that the most significant events in history – like the Exile! – may appear small and insignificant in world-historical terms. The death by crucifixion of one man by the Romans will look like a trivial moment – another failed Messiah – ho-hum!

3. Hope in the End: Jehoiachin's Seat at the Table (v31-34)

We suddenly jump 21 years from the final exile in 582 BC all the way to 561 BC – the 37th year of the exile of Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin, the grandson of Josiah, had been 18 years old when he became king. He reigned for three months and then was taken captive to Babylon in 597 B.C. Now, at the age of 56, he is finally brought out of prison.

There is still a Son of David alive in captivity – and even treated well by the king of Babylon. He has a seat at the king's table. Indeed, the exiled king of Jerusalem is exalted over the seats of the other kings. In other words, after two chapters where Babylon is painted as the city that is opposed to the LORD and to his people – the very end of the book of Jeremiah reminds us that we must never confuse the earthly city of

Babylon with the anti-city – Babylon the Great – the Harlot – the enemy of God and his people. Where are the nations of the earth? They lie in the dust of death. What about the son of David? Jehoiachin is in exile and by this time in the narrative, he is presumed dead. But there is a sort of resurrection here. The son of David is now seated in honor at the table of the King of Babylon. No, that is not where he should be! He should be seated at the right hand of God. But that day will come. Because God has not forgotten his promises! Even in the midst of his anger, God remembers mercy to the son of David. And God will raise up the son of David from death. David's hope is not that God will deliver him from death. Rather, David's hope is that God will bring him through death unto life eternal.

It has taken us 52 chapters to get to the exile – but if you think that it has been a long journey for you, just imagine what it was like for Jeremiah! He knew for 40 years that the end was coming. He knew for 40 years that there was no escape. You have only had to endure 40 sermons – 40 weeks in which we have heard how Jeremiah's words reflect both judgment and hope. Because even though Jeremiah never offers hope that the exile can be avoided, he does offer hope! You may have a future! But only if you renounce the future that you wanted and expected. **Jeremiah 29:11** – *“I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future.”* Are you willing to surrender the future that you wanted and expected? Are you willing to *deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus?*

Ryken: Many times God's prophet warned what would happen if his people did not repent of their sins. Jeremiah said enemies would come from the north (**6:22-23; 10:22; 13:20**). He prophesied that they would surround Jerusalem (**4:16-17; 6:3-6**). He foresaw that the city and the country would lie in ruins (**4:20, 27; 9:11; 12:10-12; 19:10-13**). He foretold of famine and death in the streets (**9:20-22; 14:1-6, 18**). He warned Zedekiah that unless he repented he would be handed over to Nebuchadnezzar (**34:1-3; 37:17; 38:17-18**). He prophesied that Jerusalem would be burned to the ground (**37:10; 38:18, 23**), even describing how the palace cedars would be cast into the flames (**22:7**). He warned that the Babylonians would loot the temple (**27:19-22**). Finally, Jeremiah told how God's people would be carried into exile (**10:17-18; 13:17; 16:13; 25:11**).

Nearly every verse in **Jeremiah 52** is a fulfilled prophecy. In fact, reading the chapter is a good way to review the entire book of Jeremiah. The facts speak for themselves: Jeremiah spoke the true words of God. This chapter not only vindicates Jeremiah, it vindicates the holiness and justice of God. It proves that God says what he means and does what he says. . .

The fall of Jerusalem teaches that God is a righteous judge who does not leave the guilty unpunished. **Matthew Henry** thus ends his commentary on the book by saying:

. . . no word of God shall fall to the ground, but the event will fully answer the prediction; and the unbelief of man shall not make God's threatenings, any more than his promise, of no effect. The justice and truth of God are here written in

bloody characters, for the conviction or the confusion of all those that make a jest of his threatenings. *Let them not be deceived, God is not mocked.*

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