

JEREMIAH

Introduction:

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*, observes about Jeremiah: “The man and his message and his times are inseparably bound together, and must be interpreted together.” He calls Jeremiah “one of the bravest, tenderest, and most pathetic figures in history.” Jeremiah came on the scene of Israel’s history eighty or one hundred years after Isaiah’s death and carried on his prophetic ministry for more than forty years, covering the reign of Judah’s last five kings.

Baxter compares Jeremiah in character to our Lord Jesus Christ, saying: “I know of no man who reveals a truer heart-likeness to Jesus Himself than does Jeremiah, in his suffering sympathy both with God and men, in his un-retaliating forbearance, his yearning concern for his fellows, his guileless motive, his humility, his willingness for self-sacrifice, and his utter faithfulness, even to the point of unsparing severity in denunciation.” And: “No man ever shrank from publicity as did Jeremiah; yet singularly enough, it is this man, who, of all the prophets, gives us the fullest revelation of his own character. This is because the man and his message are in such passionate oneness under such tragic circumstances.”

The Name:

According to *Hitchcock’s Bible Names Dictionary*, the name Jeremiah means: “exaltation of the Lord.” According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* the name “signifies either ‘Yahweh hurls’ or ‘Yahweh founds.’” R. H. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states more cautiously: “The name Jeremiah appeared in Hebrew either as *yirm^eya* or *yirm^eyahu*, which was rendered by the LXX as *Ieremias* and by Latin versions *Jeremias*. The precise meaning of the name is unknown, with suggested interpretations including ‘the Lord found,’ ‘the Lord exalts’ and ‘the Lord throws down.’”

Jeremiah identifies himself as the son of Hilkiyah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.”¹ Anathoth was a village three miles northeast of Jerusalem.

Historical background:

Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah; his prophecies covered a period of 41 years (627 BC – 586 BC). He continued to prophesy in Egypt which means that he may have been active for over 50 years.

Jeremiah began his ministry during the reign of King Josiah, who was God-fearing and endeavored to reform Judah’s spiritual condition and bring the nation back under God. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* Jeremiah “left in doubt of the fact that the catastrophe of the judgment of God over the city would soon come (Jer 1:11 ff); and when, after a few years, the Book of the Law was found in the temple (2 Kings 22 and 23), Jeremiah preached ‘the words of this covenant’ to the people in the town and throughout the land (11:1-8; 17:19-27), and exhorted to obedience to the Divine command; but in doing this then and afterward he became the object of much hostility, especially in his native city, Anathoth. Even his own brethren or near relatives entered into a conspiracy against him by declaring that he was a dangerous fanatic (Jer 12:6). However, the condition of Jeremiah under this pious king was the most happy in his career, and he lamented the latter’s untimely death in sad lyrics, which the author of Chronicles was able to use (2 Chron 35:25), but which have not come down to our times. Much more unfavorable was the prophet’s condition after the death of Josiah. Jehoahaz-Shallum, who ruled only 3 months, received the announcement of his sentence from Jeremiah (Jer 22:10 ff). Jehoiakim (609 BC - 598 BC) in turn favored the heathen worship, and oppressed the people through his love of luxury and by the erection of grand structures (Jer 22:13 ff). In addition, his politics were treacherous. He conspired with Egypt against his superior, Nebuchadnezzar. Epoch-making was the 4th year of Jehoiakim, in which, in the battle of Carchemish, the Chaldeans gained the upper hand in Hither Asia, as Jeremiah had predicted (46:1-12). Under Jehoiakim

1. Jer. 1:1

Jeremiah delivered his great temple discourse (7-9; 10:17-25). The priests for this reason determined to have the prophet put to death (chapter 26). However, influential elders interceded for him, and the princes yet showed some justice. He was, however, abused by the authorities at the appeal of the priests (chapter 20). According to 36:1 ff, he was no longer permitted to enter the place of the temple. For this reason the Lord commanded him to collect his prophecies in a book roll, and to have them read to the people by his faithful pupil Baruch (chapter 36; compare chapter 45). The book fell into the hands of the king, who burned it. However, Jeremiah dictated the book a second time to Baruch, together with new additions. Jehoiachin or Coniah (Jer 22:24 ff), the son of Jehoiakim, after a reign of 3 months, was taken into captivity to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar, together with a large number of his nobles and the best part of the people (Jer 24:1; 29:2), as the prophet had predicted (22:20-30). But conditions did not improve under Zedekiah (597 BC - 586 BC). This king was indeed not as hostile to Jeremiah as Jehoiakim had been; but all the more hostile were the princes and the generals, who were now in command after the better class of these had been deported to Babylon. They continually planned rebellion against Babylon, while Jeremiah was compelled to oppose and put to naught every patriotic agitation of this kind. Finally, the Babylonian army came in order to punish the faithless vassal who had again entered into an alliance with Egypt. Jeremiah earnestly advised submission, but the king was too weak and too cowardly as against his nobles. A long siege resulted, which caused the direst sufferings in the life of Jeremiah. The commanders threw him into a vile prison, charging him with being a traitor (37:11 ff). The king, who consulted him secretly, released him from prison, and put him into the ‘court of the guard’ (37:17 ff), where he could move around freely, and could again prophesy. Now that the judgment had come, he could again speak of the hopeful future (chapters 32, 33). Also chapters 30 and 31, probably, were spoken about this time. But as he continued to preach submission to the people, those in authority cast him into a slimy cistern, from which the pity of a courtier, Ebed-melech, delivered him (39:15-18). He again returned to the court of the guard, where he remained until Jerusalem was taken. After the capture of the city, Jeremiah was treated with great consideration by the Babylonians, who knew that he had spoken in favor of their government (Jer 39:11 ff; 40:1 ff). They gave him the choice of going to Babylon or of remaining in his native land. He decided for the latter, and went to the governor Gedaliah, at Mizpah, a man worthy of all confidence. But when this man, after a short time, was murdered by conscienceless opponents, the Jews who had been left in Palestine, becoming alarmed and fearing the vengeance of the Chaldaeans, determined to immigrate to Egypt. Jeremiah advised against this most earnestly, and threatened the vengeance of Yahweh, if the people should insist upon their undertaking (42:1 ff). But they insisted and even compelled the aged prophet to go with them (43:1 ff). Their first goal was Tahpanhes (Daphne), a town in Lower Egypt. At this place he still continued to preach the word of God to his fellow-Israelites; compare the latest of his preserved discourses in 43:8-13, as also the sermon in chapter 44, delivered at a somewhat later time but yet before 570 BC. At that time Jeremiah must have been from 70 to 80 years old. He probably died soon after this in Egypt.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, dates Jeremiah’s oracles against the following historical background:

- a. Under Josiah 1:1–9; 2:1 – 3:5; 3:6 – 6:30; 7:1 – 10:25; 18:1 – 20:18
- b. Under Jehoiakim 11:1 – 13:14; 14:1 – 15:21; 16:1 – 17:27; 22:1– 30; 23:1– 8, 9– 40; 25:1– 14, 15– 38; 26:1– 24; 35:1– 19; 36:1– 32; 45:1– 5; 46:1– 12; 13– 28; 47:1– 7; 48:1– 47
- c. Under Jehoiachin 31:15–47
- d. Under Zedekiah 21:1 – 22:30; 24:1–10; 27:1–22; 28:1–17; 29:1–32; 30:1 – 31:40; 32:1–44; 33:1– 26; 34:1–7; 8–11; 12–22; 37:1–21; 38:1–28; 39:1–18; 49:1–22, 23–33, 34– 39; 50:1 – 51:64
- e. Under Gedaliah 40:1 – 42:22; 43:1 – 44:30
- f. Historical Appendix 52:1–34

Character of Jeremiah:

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states: “The Book of Jeremiah gives us not only a fuller account of the life and career of its author than do the books of the other prophets, but we also learn more about his own inner and personal life and feelings than we do of Isaiah or any other prophet. From this source we learn that he was, by nature, gentle and tender in his feelings, and sympathetic. A decided contrast to this is found in the hard and unmerciful judgment which it was his mission to announce. God made him strong and firm and immovable like iron for his mission (Jer 1:18; 15:20). This contrast between his naturally warm personal feelings and his strict Divine mission not rarely appears in the heart-utterances found in his prophecies. At first he rejoiced when God spoke to him (15:16); but soon these words of God were to his heart a source of pain and of suffering (15:17 ff). He would have preferred not to utter them; and then they burned in his breast as a fire (20:7 ff; 23:9). He personally stood in need of love, and yet was not permitted to marry (Jer 16:1 f). He was compelled to forego the pleasures of youth (15:17). He loved his people as nobody else, and yet was always compelled to prophesy evil for it, and seemed to be the enemy of his nation. This often caused him to despair. The enmity to which he fell a victim, on account of his declaration of nothing but the truth, he deeply felt; see his complaints (9:1 ff; 12:5 ff; 15:10; 17:14-18; 18:23, and often). In this sad antagonism between his heart and the commands of the Lord, he would perhaps wish that God had not spoken to him; he even cursed the day of his birth (15:10; 20:14-18; compare Job 3:1 ff). Such complaints are to be carefully distinguished from that which the Lord through His Spirit communicated to the prophet. God rebukes him for these complaints, and demands of him to repent and to trust and obey Him (Jer 15:19). This discipline makes him all the more unconquerable. Even his bitter denunciations of his enemies (11:20 ff; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23) originated in part in his passionate and deep nature, and show how great is the difference between him and that perfect Sufferer, who prayed even for His deadly enemies. But Jeremiah was nevertheless a type of that Suffering Savior, more than any of the Old Testament saints. He, as a priest, prayed for his people, until God forbade him to do so (7:16; 11:14; 14:11; 18:20). He was compelled more than all the others to suffer through the anger of God, which was to afflict his people. The people themselves also felt that he meant well to them. A proof of this is seen in the fact that the rebellious people, who always did the contrary of what he had commanded them, forced him, the unwelcome prophet of God, to go along with them, to Egypt, because they felt that he was their good genius.”

Outline:

From *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, by R. K. Harrison, we copy the following outline:

A. PROPHECIES RELATING TO CURRENT HISTORY AND DOMESTIC MATTERS (1:1 – 45:5)

- I. PROPHECIES OCCURRING BETWEEN 625 BC AND THE FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM (1:1–20:18)
- II. UTTERANCES RELATING TO THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND FALSE PROPHETS (21:1 – 25:14)
- III. A SUMMARY OF PROPHECIES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS (25:15–38)
- IV. PREDICTIONS OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM (26:1 – 28:17)
- V. LETTER TO THE DEPORTEES IN BABYLONIA (29:1–32)
- VI. MESSAGES OF CONSOLATION (30:1 – 31:40)
- VII. PROPHECIES FROM THE TIME OF ZEDEKIAN (32:1 – 44:30)
- VIII. A MESSAGE TO BARUCH (45:1–5)

B. ORACLES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS (46:1–51:64)

- I. AGAINST EGYPT (46:1–28)

- II. AGAINST PHILISTIA (47:1–7)
- III. AGAINST MOAB (48:1–47)
- IV. AGAINST AMMON (49:1–6)
- V. AGAINST EDOM (49:23–27)
- VI. AGAINST DAMASCUS (49:28–33)
- VII. AGAINST KEDAR AND HAZOR (49:34–39)
- VIII. AGAINST ELAM (49:34–39)
- IX. AGAINST BABYLON (50:1 – 51:64)

C. HISTORICAL APPENDIX (52:1–34)

A. PROPHECIES RELATING TO CURRENT HISTORY AND DOMESTIC MATTERS (1:1 – 45:5)

I. PROPHECIES OCCURRING BETWEEN 625 BC AND THE FOURTH YEAR OF JEHOIAKIM (1:1–20:18)

1. Jeremiah is called and commissioned 1:1-19

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, one of the priests at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin.

2 The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah,

3 and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile.

4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,

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

6 “Ah, Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

7 But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.

8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

11 The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “I see the branch of an almond tree,” I replied.

12 The LORD said to me, “You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled.”

13 The word of the LORD came to me again: “What do you see?” “I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,” I answered.

14 The LORD said to me, “From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land.

15 I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms,” declares the LORD. “Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding walls and against all the towns of Judah.

16 I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshiping what their hands have made.

17 “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.

18 Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land.
19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,” declares the LORD.

In the introduction of this book, we find the same Hebrew word *dabar* used for “the words of Jeremiah” (v.1) and for “the word of the LORD.” The Hebrew *dabar* has a wider meaning than the English “word.” It also stands for “speech” as in the verse: “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.”¹ It can indicate a cause, as in the verse: “But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household *because of* Abram’s wife Sarai.”² And it is used for the Word of God, as in “After this, *the word of the LORD* came to Abram in a vision: ‘Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.’”³ This gives us liberty to interpret “the words of Jeremiah” as not only the things he said, but also the reason for his saying so and the circumstances into which these prophecies brought him.

Being the son of Hilkiah from the town of Anathoth, one of the places assigned to the tribe of Levi,⁴ makes Jeremiah a member of that tribe and of the priestly cast. The thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah would date Jeremiah’s call to the prophetic ministry at approximately 627 BC.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, remarks about v.1: “This verse describes the point at which the word of the Lord became a matter of great personal importance to Jeremiah. As a boy he may well have been familiar with the priestly practices, but in any case there is no evidence that he ever served as a priest. It is possible, however, that what he observed in the cultus as a young man influenced his attitude towards the priesthood in subsequent days. His future life and thought were molded to a large extent by an early acquaintance with the utterances of the eighth-century BC prophets such as Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, and probably also by the lives and saying of Elijah and Elisha. Hosea especially seems to have gripped the imagination of the young Jeremiah with his striking illustrations of divine love for wayward Israel. In subsequent oracles Jeremiah was to employ the century-old imagery of Hosea which described Israel’s apostasy as harlotry or adultery.”

We read in v.4 Jeremiah’s statement: “The word of the LORD came to me.” When God speaks to a person a miracle of transformation takes place in his life. At one time in Jesus’ ministry, an argument arose between the Jews and Jesus because Jesus called God: “My Father.” We read: “Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, ‘I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?’ ‘We are not stoning you for any of these,’ replied the Jews, ‘but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your Law, ‘I have said you are gods’ ‘? If he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came — and the Scripture cannot be broken— what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world? Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, ‘I am God’s Son’?”⁵ When God speaks to a person He shares His divine nature with him.

The Hebrew text of v.4 reads literally: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet unto the nations.” The Hebrew uses two different words for “womb” in this verse, but that does not seem to have any special meaning. A footnote in *The New International Version* indicates that “I knew you” can also be read: “I chose you.”

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1. Gen. 11:1
 2. Gen. 12:17
 3. Gen. 15:1
 4. Josh. 21:18
 5. John 10:31-36

When we read a statement like this, our reaction would be that Jeremiah had no choice in the matter because God had predestined him before he even existed. Our problem is that God is eternal and we live within the confines of time. The only way we can conceive of eternity and speak about it is in terms of time. Time, however, is a created entity to which God is not subjected. There is in this for us a missing dimension that makes it virtually impossible to understand how eternity influences time. On the other hand, experience teaches us that we have the ability to choose, to accept or reject, even that which God has pre-ordained. Jeremiah had the option to refuse God’s call. The following objections he puts before God indicate that he was not a mere puppet programmed to do things that God wanted done. The very fact that God takes pains to explain the process of his call is indication of Jeremiah’s freedom of choice.

God’s speaking to Jeremiah was also meant to assure his full cooperation in the carrying out of his prophetic task. At several points in this book we see that there was a continuous tension in this prophet’s heart between what God intended him to be and what his natural tendencies would have chosen. We will deal with those moments when we get to them in the text.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary states about Jeremiah’s call: “This word came to Jeremiah by means of inspiration, and is neither the product of a reflective musing as to what his calling was to be, nor the outcome of an irresistible impulse, felt within him, to come forward as a prophet. It was a supernatural divine revelation vouchsafed to him, which raised his spiritual life to a state of ecstasy, so that he both recognized the voice of God and felt his lips touched by the hand of God (v. 9). Further, he saw in spirit, one after another, two visions which God interpreted to him as confirmatory tokens of his divine commission (vv. 11-19). Jeremiah’s appointment to be a prophet for the nations follows upon a decree of God’s, fixed before he was conceived or born. God in His counsel has not only foreordained our life and being, but has predetermined before our birth what is to be our calling upon this earth; and He has accordingly so influenced our origin and our growth in the womb, as to prepare us for what we are to become, and for what we are to accomplish on behalf of His kingdom.”

When we come to a point in our lives where we realize that God has prepared a blueprint for us for the time we spend on earth and we begin our search to find out what the plan contains, we experience the exhilarating joy of discovery that God had prepared a place for us in which we fit as perfectly as the stones that were prepared at the quarry for the building of Solomon’s temple.¹ Most struggles in life are caused by the fact that we try to trace our own paths through life instead of accepting the way God prepared for us.

Jeremiah’s objection (v.6) is “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.” The Hebrew word used for “child” is *na`ar*, which gives no clue as to the actual age. It can cover the age of infancy to adolescence. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “The same word is translated ‘young man,’ 2 Sam 18:5. From the long duration of his office, from Josiah’s time until at least the passing of the Jewish remnant into Egypt after the capture of Jerusalem (Jer 1:2-3; 40:1, etc.; 43:8, etc.), it is supposed he was at his call at least under 25 years of age.”

Jeremiah’s sense of reality would indicate more maturity than he gave himself credit for. A sense of insufficiency for the tasks demonstrates insight in the immensity of the task. A more common youthful approach to the challenges of life would have been an unwarranted assurance of being sufficient for it. As in the case of young Solomon, who asked God for wisdom needed to rule the nation of Israel, Jeremiah understood that he did not have what it took to do what God wanted him to do and to be what God wanted him to be. In connection with this, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* offers the following ditty: “How ready is the man to go, whom God hath never sent! How timorous, diffident, and slow, God’s chosen instrument!” Jeremiah could have asked the question Paul would later ask: “And who is equal to such a task?” which the Apostle answered with: “Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.”²

1. See I Kings 6:7.

2. II Cor. 2:16; 3:5

Jeremiah may also have thought about the impact his youthful utterances would have upon his audience. He may have had enough understanding of the spiritual condition of the people of his day to know that a call to repentance would have little effect upon them and that even if a person who had gained a reputation for himself would speak the message, it would meet with resistance; let alone if it were “only a child” preaching!

Humanly speaking, Jeremiah’s task was doomed to fail, and history shows that, humanly speaking, it did. Yet, God uses children for His glory to put His enemies to shame. David understood this when he wrote the Psalm: “O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”¹ It is part of the foolishness of the cross to shame the wisdom of the world.²

Interestingly, Jeremiah, as a youth, presented the same kind of objections to God as Moses did at the age of eighty! Evidently, the problem is not age but a misconception about the audience to whom the message must be given. We tend to rate human beings of rank in this world higher than God. We believe that human authority is more impressive than God’s omnipotence from which all human power is derived. When Jesus made the good confession before Pontius Pilate,³ He put the governor straight. Pilate said: “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” to which Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”⁴ If, as ambassadors of Christ, we are not fully convinced that we are part of all authority that is given to Him, we will do a poor job in representing Him in this world and we will be intimidated by the resistance we meet to the message we preach.

What made Jeremiah say: “I am only a child” was fear of man. God counters this fear by touching Jeremiah’s mouth. When God called Moses and Moses offered the objection that he had a speech impediment, God made it clear that He was not going to heal him. We read that God said: “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?”⁵ God made clear to Moses that he would have to live with his weakness so that God would receive the glory. Jeremiah did not need to learn this lesson; he was thoroughly convinced of his weakness and all he needed was God’s touch to make him realize that God could use him the way he was. The Apostle Paul advised Timothy, who seemed to have a problem similar to Jeremiah: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”⁶

God’s touch of Jeremiah’s mouth put the Word of God in his mouth, meaning that henceforth God would tell him what to say and to whom to say it. The task description God gave to Jeremiah went well beyond and above the task young King Solomon envisioned. Solomon had said to God: “Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”⁷ God put Jeremiah in charge of nations and kingdoms, the superpowers of his day, “to uproot and tear down, to

1. Ps. 8:1,2
2. See I Cor. 1:18-30.
3. I Tim. 6:13
4. John 19:10,11
5. Ex. 4:11
6. I Tim. 4:12
7. I Kings 3:7-9

destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.” If nothing else had made Jeremiah afraid, this immense task certainly would!

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states here: “This section depicts in a sensitive and appealing manner the intimacy existing between God and His chosen servant. As elsewhere in Scripture God is revealed as a communicating deity who respects human individuality, speaks to people at their own level of understanding, and uses language whose intent cannot possibly be mistaken. He is also prepared for an intelligent response and will listen to explanations or argument, whether framed in the stammering tongue of Moses or the lengthy expostulations of Job. Response, however, is the important consideration when God has spoken to man, and Jeremiah, though perhaps slow and unwilling, was nevertheless by no means deficient in this respect. The thought that his very existence was a conscious part of divine purpose and not an incidental biological occurrence must have given him a special sense of destiny. This in turn doubtless contributed to his determination to fulfill his prophetic mission regardless of personal considerations.”

The Hebrew verbs used in v.10 are worth a closer look. The word for “I appoint you” is *paqad*, which has the meaning of “to oversee.” It speaks not only of a call to prophecy, but of the authority that accompanies the office. We find it in the verse: “Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned.”¹ The idea is that the Word of prophecy Jeremiah had to pronounce would have the original power of creating what it said. There is a series of two parallel verbs that spell destruction: “uproot – tear down,” and “destroy – overthrow,” followed by two parallel verbs for rebuilding: “build – plant.” “Uproot – tear down” are alliterations in Hebrew: *nathash* and *nathats*. The former refers to that which grows (plants), the latter to buildings. The first is what God had created, the second is manmade. “Destroy and overthrow” is the translation of the Hebrew *abad* and *harac*. *Abad* literally means: “to be lost” or “to perish.” *Harac* means: “to pull down.” Here the order of plants and buildings is reversed. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “There are four words of destruction, and but two words of restoration, as if the message were chiefly of evil. And such was Jeremiah’s message to his contemporaries. Yet are all God’s dealings finally for the good of His people. The Babylonian exile was, for the moment, a time of chastisement; it also became a time of national repentance (see Jer 24:5-7).”

The way God presents Jeremiah’s task suggests that the events that form world history are not merely the result of human actions and endeavors; they are heavily influenced by the Word of God. It is the Word of God put in Jeremiah’s mouth that causes the negatives of uprooting and destruction of things done in rebellion against God. And it is the same Word of the Lord that creates the events that are according to God’s will. Jesus responded to the resistance the Pharisees put up to His ministry by saying: “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots.”² But that does not leave our planet without any vegetation: “Instead of the thornbush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD’s renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed.”³ And: “In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”⁴

We are given the impression that Jeremiah received two signs at the moment of his call, but that is not necessarily the case. This revelation may have come to him at a later date. The way God catches Jeremiah’s attention is rather unusual. Whether Jeremiah was in a trance and saw an almond branch that was not part of an earthly scene, or whether he was walking outside and passed a tree in bloom, we are not told. I

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1. Gen. 39:4
 2. Matt. 15:13
 3. Isa. 55:13
 4. II Peter 3:13

like to think it was the latter, just as I like to picture Jesus and His disciples passing a vineyard with ripe grapes when Jesus said: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful” and “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”¹

There is a play-on-words in the vision of the almond branch. The Hebrew word for “almond” or “almond tree” is *shaqed*, the word rendered “hasten” in the following verse is *shaqad*, “to be alert.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* quotes Pliny, who said about the almond tree: “It blossoms in January, when other trees are locked up in their winter’s repose; and it bears fruit in March, just at the commencement of spring, when other trees only begin to bud.”

But there is more than a play-on-words. The Hebrew word, translated “branch” is *maqel* which can also be rendered “stick.” As such we find it in the verse about the first Passover celebration: “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your *staff* in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the LORD’s Passover.”² For Jeremiah, who belonged to a family of priests, there must have been a strong reminder of the confirmation of Aaron’s call to the priesthood in this. When the Israelites disputed Aaron’s position as high priest, it was the blooming of Aaron’s staff that confirmed God’s choice. We read: “So Moses spoke to the Israelites, and their leaders gave him twelve staffs, one for the leader of each of their ancestral tribes, and Aaron’s staff was among them. Moses placed the staffs before the LORD in the Tent of the Testimony. The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.”³ This first vision God gave Jeremiah after his call was a confirmation of both the message and the man.

“You have seen correctly” is probably more than a mere affirmation of Jeremiah’s good eyesight; it suggests that Jeremiah understood what God was showing him. There may be some proverbial use of language here involving the almond branch that is beyond our grasp. In Ezekiel’s prophecy about the destruction of Jerusalem we find the same image used. We read: “The day is here! It has come! Doom has burst forth, the rod has budded, arrogance has blossomed! Violence has grown into a rod to punish wickedness; none of the people will be left, none of that crowd — no wealth, nothing of value.”⁴

It is good to remember at this point that Jeremiah received this vision when the spiritual climate in Judah under the reign of King Josiah seemed to be better than ever. Josiah had a conversion experience at age 16 and when he turned 20 he began a campaign of spiritual renewal in Jerusalem and Judah.⁵ But the king’s personal zeal failed to bring about a true revival among the population at large.

There is no reason to assume that the second vision of the boiling pot was not given at the same time as the first. If the almond branch proclaimed that God was ready to act, the boiling pot indicated what He was going to do and how He would do it. Again, there is a connection with Ezekiel which indicates that the image of a cooking pot conveyed a proverbial message that is beyond retrieval for us. In Ezekiel’s prophecy the pot represents security, but this is not the case in the message God gives here to Jeremiah. We read in Ezekiel: “The LORD said to me, ‘Son of man, these are the men who are plotting evil and giving wicked advice in this city. ‘They say, ‘ ‘Will it not soon be time to build houses? This city is a cooking pot, and we are the meat.’ ‘ Therefore prophesy against them; prophesy, son of man.’ Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon me, and he told me to say: ‘This is what the LORD says: That is what you are saying, O

1. John 15:1,2,5
2. Ex. 12:11
3. Num. 17:6-8
4. Ezek. 7:10,11
5. See II Chron. 34:3-7.

house of Israel, but I know what is going through your mind. You have killed many people in this city and filled its streets with the dead. ‘Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: The bodies you have thrown there are the meat and this city is the pot, but I will drive you out of it.’ “¹

Jeremiah’s cooking pot is boiling over and is “tilting away from the north,” meaning that it spills its hot contents southward over Judah and Jerusalem. The intent is obviously to indicate that the Babylonian army would come to Judah and conquer the land. Babylon was not literally north of Judah, but Nebuchadnezzar’s troops probably came from the north when they invaded Judah. The boiling pot also represents God’s seething wrath that would be poured out over the country and the people in the same way as the seven bowls of wrath symbolized God’s final judgment in *The Book of Revelation*.

Some Bible scholars interpret v.15 symbolically, saying that it is an image of Judah coming under the dominion of the Babylonian empire. But when Jeremiah describes the fall of Jerusalem in a later chapter, he records that Nebuchadnezzar’s officials literally sat at the places indicated. We read: “Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon.”²

The point made here is that the Babylonian invasion will be an act of God. That would not make what King Nebuchadnezzar did a legal act. No monarch has the right to invade other countries and occupy them simply for the purpose of extending his own empire. What Germany, Russia or Japan did during the Second World War has no basis of justification, but that does not mean that God did not allow this to happen in order to achieve His purpose with planet Earth. In the case of Israel and Judah, God wanted to wean them from their idolatrous practices; a goal that was in fact achieved in the Babylonian captivity.

It is obvious that Jeremiah’s youthful fears were not without foundation. God sent him on a mission but the task seems overwhelmingly frightening. “Get yourself ready” is the translation of the Hebrew idiom “gird up your loins.” The Apostle Peter would later use the same idiom, putting it in a Christian context: “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”³ *The New International Version* modernizes this as: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” The idiom refers to the long robes the men wore for outer clothing that would hang down to the ground during rest and pulled up by the waist and tied up with a belt during travel.

Jeremiah was not given the same revelation of God’s glory as Isaiah or Ezekiel. He had only the voice of God to go by, no visual revelation. Yet, God wanted him to be fearless in the face of overwhelming odds. God promised him a protection that did not seem to be total or foolproof. As it would turn out, Jeremiah would experience a great deal of physical and emotional suffering, enough to keep fear alive in him. Jesus’ words come to mind: “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁴ Our problem is that the killing of the body seems to be a greater reality to us than the fires of hell. We have never seen the latter, but we are familiar with the first. The Apostle Paul struggled with this issue when he wrote to the Galatians: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”⁵

It takes a clear vision of who God is and what it is that must be protected in our life to affect the emotional healing of our fears. For Jeremiah, the Word of God to “gird his loins” must have given the initial impetus to get up and do what God ordered him to do. He must have understood that he would be alone with

1. Ezek. 11:1-7
2. Jer. 39:3
3. See I Peter 1:13 (NKJV).
4. Matt. 10:28
5. Gal. 1:10

God against the rest of the country, the rest of the world, but that being with God always constitutes a majority.

God told Jeremiah that he would need to take an act of the will against his emotions. If he would give in to fear, God would let him be afraid. He would need to keep in mind God’s promise of protection. But to be “a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall” means to be under attack. What it comes down to is that God gives no promises that eliminate the hardships. He pledges protection in the midst of suffering, not removal of suffering. There will be opposition, cruelty, sickness and even death with victory. We will be more than conquerors *in* all this, not without it. The crucifixion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ clearly proves the point. It was death that had to be conquered by going through it. The key of death had to be taken away from the enemy. We do not learn who God is during smooth sailings, but in storms. Like the Apostle Paul, Jeremiah would have to learn that what God entrusted to him would not make him personally strong, but would allow him to avail himself of God’s strength. Paul wrote: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”¹

2. Israel’ past love recalled 2:1-13

1 The word of the Lord came to me:

2 “Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.

3 Israel was holy to the LORD, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,” declares the LORD.

4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, all you clans of the house of Israel.

5 This is what the LORD says: “What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.

6 They did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?’

7 I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.

8 The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the LORD?’ Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.

9 “Therefore I bring charges against you again,” declares the LORD. “And I will bring charges against your children’s children.

10 Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this:

11 Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.

12 Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,” declares the LORD.

13 “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

Most Bible scholars consider this section of *The Book of Jeremiah* to be a condensation of his first discourse. No specific date is given, but it is generally understood that Jeremiah received this Word of the Lord at the beginning of his prophetic ministry, during the reign of King Josiah.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The second chapter forms the introduction of a group of discourses (Jeremiah 2-6), which should be read together. It is, obviously, only a summary of the prophet’s spoken words which we have in this most impressive discourse. In order to appreciate it, we must bear in

1. II Cor. 4:7

mind the external political relations and the internal religious condition of the kingdom of Judah ... Suffice it to remind the reader that Josiah's reformation — in the strict sense of the word — did not begin till the eighteenth year of that king's reign; and that the state of things was at this time complicated by a dangerous alliance with that power against whose religion the teaching of the prophets of Jehovah was a continual protest."

In introducing this chapter, *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states: "The first discourse (Jer 2:1-3:5) gives, so to speak, the program of the subjects of all the following discourses: that disloyal defection to idolatry, with which Israel has from of old requited the Lord for His love and faithfulness, brings with it sore chastening judgments. In the second discourse (Jer 3:6-6:30) faithless Judah is shown, in the fall of the ten tribes, what awaits itself in case of stiff-necked persistence in idolatry. In the third (ch. 7-10) is torn from it the support of a vain confidence in the possession of the temple and in the offering of the sacrifices commanded by the law. In the fourth (ch. 11-13) its sins are characterized as a breach of the covenant; and rejection by the Lord is declared to be its punishment. In the fifth (ch. 14-17) the hope is destroyed that the threatened chastisement can be turned aside by intercession. Finally, in the sixth (ch. 18-20) the judgment of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the kingdom of Judah is exhibited in symbolical acts. None of these discourses contains any allusions to events that occurred after Josiah's death, or stand in any relation to such events. Hence we believe we are safe in taking them for a digest of the quintessence of Jeremiah's oral preaching in the days of Josiah, and this arranged with reference to the subject matter. It was by this preaching that Jeremiah sought to give a firm footing to the king's reformatory efforts to restore and inspire new life into the public worship, and to develop the external return to the legal temple worship into an inward conversion to the living God. And it was thus he sought, while the destruction of the kingdom was impending, to save all that would let themselves be saved; knowing as he did that God, in virtue of His unchangeable covenant faithfulness, would sharply chastise His faithless people for its obstinate apostasy from Him, but had not determined to make an utter end of it."

The opening words "I remember," spoken by the Almighty are obviously an accommodation to the conditions of human life within the frame of time and space. The omniscient God, not only cannot forget as human beings do, but He does not live in time; for Him there is no past, present and future. "Remember" is a time-related word. The purpose is not for God to remind Himself of certain conditions, but to for us to look back and realize how the present is no longer a logical outcome of the past. God reminds Israel, His bride, of their honeymoon.

The Hebrew word used to typify Israel's "devotion" to the Lord is *chesed*, which is the word used for God's covenant love. *The King James Version* often renders it "lovingkindness." Jesus used an equivalent expression in His letter to the church of Laodicea, saying: "I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."¹

We could ask the question in how far Israel experienced the exodus from Egypt as a honeymoon with their God. Apart from some moments of joy and excitement, as after the crossing of the Red Sea, the people acted more as partners in a relationship that had turned sour than as newly weds enjoying the freshness of a love relationship. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments here: "God's relationship to Israel is often likened by the prophets to that of a husband to his wife (Isa 54:4; Hos 2:2-20; Ezek 16:1). Here Israel's early days are referred to as a honeymoon. Israel had left Egypt and followed her husband to a strange land (Ex 19:4). Jeremiah does not mean to deny the frequent backslidings of the early days, but he emphasizes here the nation's praiseworthy determination to follow her God into the wilderness ... Here the journey of the Hebrews through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan is referred to."

The strength of the covenant was not the intensity of Israel's love for God, but God's love for them. God wanted the people to know that He loved them as a bridegroom loves his newly acquired bride. As the Apostle John defines love: "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an

1. Rev. 2:4,5

atonement sacrifice for our sins.”¹ It was God who experienced Israel’s salvation from Egyptian slavery and her voyage to the Promised Land as a honeymoon.

The designation as “holy to the LORD” is a reference to God’s Word at the foot of Mount Sinai: “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”² Being “a kingdom of priests” would make Israel a bridge between God and the rest of the world. This is also expressed in the term “firstfruit,” *re’shiyth* in Hebrew. It was the beginning of the harvest that would be dedicated to the Lord. We find the word in the verse “Bring the best of *the firstfruits* of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.”³ The bringing of the firstfruits was not only done to indicate that the whole harvest belonged to God, but also that the harvest of the world would be the next step. God entered into a love relationship with Israel for the salvation of the whole world.

This vision constituted the basis of Israel’s own security. God would protect them as a husband protects his wife because she would be the instrument for the restoration of all of creation from the consequences of the fall.

The Pulpit Commentary interprets “all who devoured her were held guilty” as pertaining to the illegal eating of the first fruit. We read: “All that devour him shall offend; rather, *all that ate him incurred guilt*, or became guilty of a trespass. Foreigners were forbidden to eat of consecrated things; by breaking this law they became guilty of a ‘trespass,’ having invaded the rights of Jehovah (... Leviticus 22:10, 15, 16). The word for ‘trespass’ is the same as that rendered ‘guilt.’”

Although Jeremiah lived in Judah and prophesied particularly to the southern kingdom, v.4 seems to address all the twelve tribes, the nation as a whole. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.4 and 5: “The ingratitude and stupidity of the entire nation are evident here. Though Israel had been dignified uniquely by becoming God’s bride, she had soon forgotten her first love (*cf.* 2:32; 3:21). The question *what wrong did your fathers find in me* (RSV) actually expressed an emphatic negative. In the phrase *went after worthlessness* (RSV) the noun *hahebel* and its related verb probably constitute a play on the name ‘Baal,’ the principle deity of Canaanite worship. In Deuteronomy and secular Near Eastern international treaties the phrase ‘to go after’ meant ‘to serve as a vassal.’”

The Hebrew text of v.5 reads literally: “Thus says the LORD, what iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity and are become vain?” *Hebel*, “vanity” is the keyword of *Ecclesiastes*, which opens with the statement: “ ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’”⁴ The other side of the coin is that meaning can only be found in fellowship with God.

The question “What fault did your fathers find in me?” may refer to the law on jealousy in *The Book of Numbers* in which a husband suspects his wife of having slept with another man.⁵ There was no proof that anything immoral had taken place, but the man was suspicious of his wife because of a cooling off in the relationship. In using this example God asks the people if they thought it was His fault that their first love for Him faded away. Rather, Israel’s problem was that she forgot her history. People who forget where they came from do not know where they are going either. And those who forget the past are forced to relive it.

The people of Jeremiah’s day had not personally experienced the desert crossing, but it had been carefully documented for them to read it. Moses spoke about the desert Israel went through as “that vast and

1. I John 4:10
2. Ex. 19:5,6
3. Ex. 23:19
4. Eccl. 1:2
5. See Num. 5:14-31.

dreadful desert.”¹ God calls it: “the barren wilderness ... a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives.” The Hebrew word for darkness here is *tsalmaveth* which is the word David used in the Twenty-third Psalm: “Even though I walk through the valley of *the shadow of death*, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”² The birth of the nation of Israel had been accompanied by an extended period of labor pains. God had intended it to be a shorter period of about two years in which He revealed Himself to the people, in which they would receive the Ten Commandments and build the tabernacle. It turned out to be a forty-year-long time of sinful resistance in which death was the only thing to be expected. The nation of Israel was born when it crossed the Red Sea; it was reborn when it crossed the Jordan River. The people of Jeremiah’s time were the children of the generation of those who entered the Promised Land. They were the ones who defiled it.

V.8 accuses the leaders of the nation: the priests, the government officials, those who knew and applied the law, and the prophets. The priests did not serve the Lord, those in power rebelled against God’s authority, and the prophets received their inspiration from God’s enemy.

The Hebrew text of v.9 reads literally: “‘Therefore will I plead with you,’ says the LORD, ‘and with your children’s children will I plead.’” The Hebrew verb *riyb* is generally used in a legal context. It can have a negative or a positive meaning. Negatively, we find it in the story of Isaac and the shepherds of Gerar. We read: “But the herdsmen of Gerar *quarreled* with Isaac’s herdsmen and said, ‘The water is ours!’ So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well, but they *quarreled* over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, ‘Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land.’”³ David uses it positively in one of his Psalms: “*Defend* my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise.”⁴ The accusatory way in which *The New International Version* renders it seems to best fit the context.

The mention of the grandchildren reminds us of the first of the Ten Commandments, in which God says: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”⁵ The context in both cases was idolatry, which opened the door to involvement with evil spirits. These spirits could become generational, continuing their oppression from one generation to another. That is probably what God is saying here.

What Israel did in abandoning monotheism and converting to polytheism was unheard of in history. God invites the people to look to the west and the east, Kittim referring to the island of Cyprus and Kedar to the Arab tribes living east of Israel, and see if anything like that ever happened among the Gentiles. Israel’s example could be used as an argument against the evolutionist approach to theology which teaches that mankind evolved from many gods to a single one.

The Hebrew text of v.11 reads literally: “Has a nation changed their gods which yet are no gods? But my people have changed their glory [for that which] not profit.” *The New International Version* states in a footnote that some manuscripts read “My glory” instead of “their glory.” The Hebrew word *kabowd*, rendered “glory,” actually means “weight.” The thought that glory has weight is reflected in Paul’s statement: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and

1. Deut. 1:19
2. Ps. 23:4
3. Gen. 26:20-22
4. Ps. 119:154
5. Ex. 20:4-6

eternal weight of glory.”¹ *Kabowd* also has the meaning of possessions, as in the verse: “Jacob heard that Laban’s sons were saying, ‘Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father.’”² We find it in the same sense in which it is used here in the verse “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”³ Israel set the trend of disregarding that which gave meaning to life and to their existence as a nation when they made the gold calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. This was the Psalmist’s opinion, when he stated: “They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass.”⁴ There is in the words “worthless idols” another play-on-words on the name of Baal. There is also a suggestion of “rags” in the term.

Although glory is an illusive concept for us, something that cannot be defined or categorized, we all know what it is when we see it and we strive to obtain it. The human tendency is to accumulate possessions in the belief that that gives weight and substance to existence. We see that in the way *kabowd* is used in describing the wealth of Laban. Only God possesses *kabowd* and He shares it with us. If we enter into a personal relationship with Him, His glory fills our soul. If we seek to add glory by adding possessions, we exchange glory for rags. Jesus issued the warning: “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”⁵

God calls the heavens as witness to observe the immensity of Israel’s sin. The appeal is probably to the inhabitants of heaven, the heavenly beings who were also witnesses of the creation of the material universe and of the population of planet earth. They had seen the fall of mankind and the development of the plan of salvation, culminating in the call of Abraham and the birth of Israel, God’s chosen nation. V.12 reads literally in Hebrew: “Be astonished, o you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be very desolate, says the LORD.” “Astonished” is the rendering of the Hebrew *shamem*, meaning “to be stunned.” It depicts a ruined city, as in the verse: “I will turn your cities into ruins and *lay waste* your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.”⁶ “Shudder” is the translation of the Hebrew word *sa`ar* which refers to a storm and the effect of fear it has upon the human body “to shiver.” As such we find it used in Job’s statement: “The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and *as a storm* hurleth him out of his place.”⁷ The third verb *charab*, which is in a part that *The New International Version* omits, means literally “to parch.” As such we find it used in the Psalm verse, describing the crossing of the Red Sea: “He rebuked the Red Sea, and it dried up; he led them through the depths as through a desert.”⁸

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on the two sins mentioned in v.13: “Whereas the heathen are guilty only of idolatry, the covenant nation has offended on two grave counts, that of abandoning the living God and choosing to serve idols. God is here described as *a fountain of living waters, i.e.*, a spring or rivulet which would flow into a cistern for storage. Christ gives this same ‘living water’ to all who will receive it, to be a well springing up to everlasting life (*cf.* Jn. 4:10–14; Rev. 21:6). But instead of accepting a salvation based upon divine grace, the Israelites preferred one achieved by human works. Thus they had hewn out for themselves worthless idols (*cf.* 1:16) which in the end were unable to

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1. II Cor. 4:17 (*New King James Version*).
 2. Gen. 31:1
 3. Ex. 40:34
 4. Ps. 106:20
 5. Luke 12:15
 6. Lev. 26:31
 7. Job 27:21 (*King James Version*)
 8. Ps. 106:9

meet their deepest spiritual needs, just as a cracked cistern which allowed its contents to seep away was of little use for sustaining life.”

The Pulpit Commentary adds about the “spring of living water” and the “cisterns”: “Such reservoirs were dug in the ground ... and chiefly intended for storing living waters, *i.e.* those of springs and rivulets... A cistern, by its very nature, will only hold a limited amount, and the water ‘collected from clay roofs or from marly soil, has the color of weak soapsuds, the taste of the earth or the stable. Who would prefer such an impure supply to the sweet, wholesome water of a fountain? But these cisterns cannot even be depended upon for this poor, turbid drink. They are ‘broken,’ like so many even of the best rock hewn cisterns ... How fine a description of the combined attractiveness and disappointingness of heathen religions, qualities the more striking in proportion to the scale on which the religions problem is realized (e.g. in Hinduism)!”

“Living water” is a symbol that symbolizes our relationship with God perfectly. Although we, as human beings cannot live in water, we cannot live without it either. The human body can survive a lack of food for an extended period of time, but it perishes within days when dehydrated. Our spiritual condition without God is like physical dehydration. In David’s words: “For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.”¹ The two sins Israel committed, in abandoning God as the source of life and trying to become self-sufficient, amounted to spiritual suicide. A healthy human being is one who believes with all his heart that without God he can do nothing. Jesus modeled this attitude for us when He said: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.”² The core of man’s original sin was that he desired wisdom apart from God. “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.”³ The result was death.

Jeremiah’s words are a call to return to the source of life. There is enough thirst remaining in the human soul to respond to Jesus’ invitation: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” John adds: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”⁴ The Holy Spirit will help us to get rid of our broken cisterns.

3. The infidelity of Israel 2:14-30

14 Is Israel a servant, a slave by birth? Why then has he become plunder?

15 Lions have roared; they have growled at him. They have laid waste his land; his towns are burned and deserted.

16 Also, the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes have shaved the crown of your head.

17 Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the LORD your God when he led you in the way?

18 Now why go to Egypt to drink water from the Shihor? And why go to Assyria to drink water from the River?

19 Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me,” declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty.

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1. Ps. 36:9
 2. John 5:19
 3. Gen. 3:6
 4. John 7:37-39

20 *“Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you!’ Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute.*

21 *I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?*

22 *Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,” declares the Sovereign LORD.*

23 *“How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. You are a swift she-camel running here and there,*

24 *a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving — in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her.*

25 *Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.’*

26 *“As a thief is disgraced when he is caught, so the house of Israel is disgraced — they, their kings and their officials, their priests and their prophets.*

27 *They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’*

28 *Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.*

29 *“Why do you bring charges against me? You have all rebelled against me,” declares the LORD.*

30 *“In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravening lion.*

The questions of v.14 are not meant to be answered for God’s satisfaction but in order to bring Israel back to reality. God considered Israel to be His son. The message Moses was to deliver to Pharaoh was: “This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, ‘Let my son go, so he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.”¹ And Hosea stated: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.”² God wanted Israel to come to the same conclusion as the prodigal in Jesus’ parable, who, after selling himself to a pig farmer, came to his senses and said: “How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”³

Jesus would later pick up Jeremiah’s theme and apply it to the people of His time and of all times, saying: “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”⁴ Satan treats his subjects as slaves, God considers His children to be His friends. Jesus says: “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”⁵

The threat to Judah was to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians in the same way as Assyria had taken the inhabitants of the northern kingdom. The latter is represented here in v.15 as the roaring of the lions. Commenting on vv.15 and 16, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: “Jeremiah thinks of the threat posed to national security by the Assyrians (*cf.* Is. 5:29) which culminated in the fall of the

1. Ex. 4:22,23
2. Hos. 11:1
3. Luke 15:17-19
4. John 8:34-36
5. John 15:15

northern kingdom in 722 BC. The fact that Israel lay in ruins was sufficient warning of what would happen to apostate Judah. Coincidentally, after the fall of Samaria the Asiatic *lions* in the general area increased numerically so that they became a danger to life (2 Ki. 17:25). In this double allusion Jeremiah shows that God can punish a rebellious and stubborn people alike by nations and nature. Nor could Judah expect firm assistance from Egypt, for in a crisis the perfidious Egyptians would have no compunction about exploiting and robbing her (*cf.* 2 Ki. 23:35) instead of rallying to her cause.”

V.16 is difficult to translate; it reads literally in Hebrew: “Also the children of Noph and Tahapanes have broken the crown of your head.” “Broken” is the translation of the Hebrew word *ra`ah*, which generally refers to being a shepherd; it can also mean: “to graze.” We find the word in “The Lord is my shepherd.”¹ The Hebrew word *godqod* stands for “the crown of the head” or “the scalp.” *The New International Version*, in a footnote, gives the alternate reading: “have cracked your skull.” *The New Living Translation* paraphrases: “Egyptians, marching from their cities of Memphis and Tahpanhes, have utterly destroyed Israel’s glory and power.” The problem is in a difference of punctuation in some of the old Hebrew manuscripts. *The Masoretic Text* allows for a reading that suggests that the Egyptians would graze Israel’s meadows. Some other manuscripts suggest the shaving of the head as an emblem of shame.

Memphis and Tahpanhes, two cities in Egypt represent what Egypt had done for Judah in response to her ill-conceived confidence in the treaty made between the two countries. *The Pulpit Commentary* states here: “From this verse onwards, Judah is personified as a woman, as appears from the suffixes in the Hebrew. Baldness was a great mark of disgrace (... 2 Kings 2:23; ... Jeremiah 48:45). There is a striking parallel to this passage in ... Isaiah 7:18-20, where, in punishment of the negotiations of Ahaz with Assyria, the prophet threatens an invasion of Judah both by Assyria and by Egypt: and employs the very same figure (see ver. 20). So here, the devastation threatened by Jeremiah is the punishment of the unhallowed coquetting with the Egyptian power of which the Jewish rulers had been recently guilty. The fact which corresponds to this prediction is the defeat of Josiah at Megiddo, and the consequent subjugation of Judah (... 2 Kings 23:29).”

Judah’s desperate effort to protect herself against the threat of Babylonia by entering into alliances with Egypt and/or Assyria is depicted as drinking from the river Shihor or Euphrates. The prophetic reproach is that in putting herself under the protection of human powers, God’s people withdraw from God’s protection and are left naked and ashamed.

Judah had living proof of what Egypt and Assyria would do to people under their control. Israel’s history had begun in the slavery of Egypt, and Assyria’s destruction of the northern kingdom served as an example of what that nation was capable of doing to its allies. The sheer stupidity of seeking protection from such world powers amounted to asking a lion to be one’s watchdog. The only explanation for this kind of desperate measures was Judah’s sinful nature and their apostasy. They had abandoned the Lord and were now siding with Satan, the murderer of men. They believed that the Almighty lacked the power to save them.

Commenting on v.20, R. K. Harrison states in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*: “Judah’s arrogance and willfulness are stated with merciless clarity. *Long ago* the nation had abandoned the high moral and spiritual ideals of the covenant to indulge in lewd fertility rites at the local sanctuaries, which were situated on hilltops so as to be close to the cosmic deity Baal and other celestial members of the pantheon. So seduced were they by Canaanite religion that the people of Judah refused to assume the obligations of the Sinai covenant any longer, preferring the things of the flesh to the life of the spirit. One ultimately has to choose in this matter, and Jeremiah makes the alternative just as clear as the New Testament does (*cf.* Mt. 7:14; Jas. 4:4, etc.).”

We find a variety of images in vv.20-25 that depict Judah’s sin in breaking off her relationship with the Lord and indulging in pagan rites of idolatry. In order to understand the weight of the illustrations, we must bear in mind that fellowship with God is compared to a marriage relationship, making idol worship

1. Ps. 23:1

akin to adultery. Although there was sexual perversion in the above mentioned fertility rites, the accusation is not against sexual sins but against the breaking off of a spiritual relationship. The breaking of the yoke and tearing of the bonds refer to a breaking of marriage vows, or infidelity in the worship of Yahweh.

Moses had given specific and detailed instructions about the destruction of Canaanite places of worship. We read: “Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places.”¹ Instead of doing this, Israel restored these places to their original use and practiced the abominations she was supposed to have wiped out. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the phrase “Under every green tree”: “We have no single word to convey the ‘fluid’ meaning of this expressive word. It combines, in fact, the senses of pliant, sappy, leafy.” The expression has become symbolic in the Old Testament for the practices of idol worship.

V.21 seems to be a quote from one of Asaph’s Psalms: “You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.”² Isaiah used a similar image, comparing Israel to a vineyard God planted.³ The Hebrew text uses the word *soreq* (reddish) to describe the kind of vine meant. That vine yields a purple grape, which is considered the richest variety. That kind of vine is connected to the tribe of Judah in Jacob’s blessings upon his sons. We read about Judah: “He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.”⁴ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes here: “The figure of the vine is one endeared to us by its association especially with our Lord; it was endeared to the Jews by the annual festivities of the vintage. The sacred writers are never afraid of its falling on the ear by repetition (comp. ... Jeremiah 5:10; 6:9; 12:10; ... Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2, 3; ... Ezekiel 17:6; ... Psalm 80:8-16).”

What the image is saying is that, not only was Judah’s behavior contrary to God’s intent, but it was against her own nature. The high quality vine, against all odds, began to grow wild branches that produced no fruit, or poisonous grapes. This was the consequence of her forsaking the spring of living water, and digging her own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water (v.13). Jesus shows the way fellowship with God is restored, resulting in bearing fruit for eternal life. We read in John’s Gospel: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”⁵

V.22 gives us an interesting insight into the cleanliness habits of the people of old. They evidently used detergents and soap the same way modern society does. They must also have used the same advertising techniques. We all know that soap only cleans the skin, yet modern advertisement has exchanged the word “clean” with “cleanse,” which has a moral connotation. Soap has no more effect upon our sin as the fig leaf Adam and Eve used to cover their nakedness of soul. Only God can take care of man’s sin and sinful nature. A century earlier, Isaiah had proclaimed: “ ‘Come now, let us reason together,’ says the LORD. ‘Though

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1. Deut. 12:2,3
 2. Ps. 80:8
 3. See Isa. 5:1-7.
 4. Gen. 49:11
 5. John 15:1-8

your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”¹

The people of Judah pleaded innocence to the charges of idolatry. They probably considered that God should be satisfied with the restoration of the temple under the direction of King Josiah.² We may assume that, although Josiah made extensive efforts to cleanse the country of idolatry practices, much of it was carried on in secret, which made it easy for the people to claim that it was non-existent. In reality the people practiced syncretism, observing a ritual of serving Yahweh, while carrying on the most disgusting rites of idolatry, which involved human sacrifices and sexual perversion.

Although the illustrations in vv.24 and 25 pertain to sexual behavior, the point is not human sexual practices, but spiritual fellowship with God. Human sexual life is meant to be an image of fellowship with God. The Apostle Paul compared the physical unity between husband and wife with the church’s oneness with Christ, saying: “ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church.”³ This is not merely a New Testament interpretation. That is why God equates idolatry with adultery.

Now it is true that human beings have sex life in common with most of the animal world, but the difference is that God has given to human beings the ability to control their sex drive, a gift which animals do not possess. To compare human sexual behavior to the lust of a camel or a donkey is an insult to human dignity. To compare intimacy of fellowship with God to idol worship is the most denigrating insult that can be made to any person. The Apostle Peter compares it to “A dog returns to its vomit, and, a sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”⁴ *The New International Version* uses the words: “It’s no use!” The Hebrew text reads literally: “There is no hope!” This amounts to the confession “I can’t help myself!” That may be true, but God can change man’s heart!

If it is true that idolatry was practiced in secret, people’s thought must have been that God could not see what was going on. That leads to the embarrassing picture of the thief who is caught in the act. Israel is like the man who stole his neighbor’s eggs and hid them under the cap he was wearing. The neighbor saw him and tapped him on the head, breaking the eggs and making the yoke run down his face. God shows the people that He knew exactly what they were doing in the dark.

The comparison with Israel as the thief caught in the act of stealing, serves the double purpose of emphasizing Israel’s sin of idolatry, which Judah imitated, and the punishment that nation received in being taken into captivity by the Assyrians. King Josiah may have taken exception to being compared to Israel’s kings, the other officers in charge of running the nation of Judah, officials, priests and prophets, were as corrupt as Israel’s had been.

Jeremiah demonstrates the same sarcasm as Isaiah on the point of idolatry. Not only are idols manmade, they rank infinitely lower in the order of creation than man. Isaiah described the process of the making of an idol out of a tree: “The carpenter measures with a line and makes an outline with a marker; he roughs it out with chisels and marks it with compasses. He shapes it in the form of man, of man in all his glory, that it may dwell in a shrine. He cut down cedars, or perhaps took a cypress or oak. He let it grow among the trees of the forest, or planted a pine, and the rain made it grow. It is man’s fuel for burning; some of it he takes and warms himself, he kindles a fire and bakes bread. But he also fashions a god and worships it; he makes an idol and bows down to it. Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.’ From the

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1. Isa. 1:18
 2. See II Chron 34:8.
 3. Eph. 5:31,32
 4. II Peter 2:22

rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘Save me; you are my god.’ They know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand. No one stops to think, no one has the knowledge or understanding to say, ‘Half of it I used for fuel; I even baked bread over its coals, I roasted meat and I ate. Shall I make a detestable thing from what is left? Shall I bow down to a block of wood?’ He feeds on ashes, a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’”¹

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah deny the animistic philosophy that sees spiritual beings inhabit objects such as wood or stone. Idol worship does open the door to demonic involvement, but that does not mean that demons live in idol statues, or trees, or rocks. It is when man opens his spirit to demons that the invasion takes place.

No one who understands who God is will be tempted to get involved in fellowship with demons. God is the God of heaven and earth; demons are limited in their sphere of influence. Every city had its own idol. Man is created in the image of God; we are not born of trees or pieces of wood.

The Pulpit Commentary states about the words “For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah”: “A remarkable statement, and one that well illustrates the superficial character of Hezekiah’s reformation. True, Manasseh’s reactionary reign had intervened, but his counter-movement would not have been so successful had it not been attended by the good wishes of the people; and besides, the last years of Manasseh, according to the tradition in ... 2 Chronicles 33:12-16 were devoted to undoing the mischief of his former life.”

Some of the older versions translate v. 29: “Why will you plead with Me?”² instead of “Why do you bring charges against me?” The Hebrew word *riyb* literally means: “to toss,” or “to hold a controversy.” The word is used for the first time in Scripture in the verse: “But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen and said, ‘The water is ours!’ So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him.”³

The verse depicts a courtroom scene in which God is the accused. The One who is the embodiment and source of righteousness is accused of being unrighteous. People who have broken their relationship with God by disobedience take the attitude as if God owes them an apology. An Italian lady journalist, Orianna Falaci, pushed human arrogance to the limit by seeing herself standing before the throne of God and asking: “How is that again, should I apologize to you or do you owe me one?” The answer is contained in the person of Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever. No one realizes that if God would be unrighteous, He would no longer be perfect and consequently, He would no longer be God. That would mean that all of creation would disintegrate. God would no longer be “sustaining all things by his powerful word,”⁴ and the atoms would fall to pieces; we would cease to exist. If God is “in the dock” (to use C. S. Lewis’ expression), we have lost our case. It is of this God that creation testifies that He is worthy, precisely because He has created.

God turns the tables on Judah by stating that they murdered the prophets of God. Jesus would later illustrate this powerfully in *The Parable of the Tenants of the Vineyard*.⁵ And He said of Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”⁶

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1. Isa. 44:13-20
 2. *New King James Version*
 3. Gen. 26:20
 4. See Heb. 1:3.
 5. Matt. 21:33-40
 6. Matt 23:37

4. The punishment of the nation indicated 2:31-37

31 *“You of this generation, consider the word of the LORD: “Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness? Why do my people say, ‘We are free to roam; we will come to you no more’?”*

32 *Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.*

33 *How skilled you are at pursuing love! Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.*

34 *On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in. Yet in spite of all this*

35 *you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’*

36 *Why do you go about so much, changing your ways? You will be disappointed by Egypt as you were by Assyria.*

37 *You will also leave that place with your hands on your head, for the LORD has rejected those you trust; you will not be helped by them.*

V.31 contains some expressions that are difficult to interpret. The use of the words “desert” and “darkness” take us back to the exodus from Egypt. The darkness was one of the ten plagues that struck Egypt because of its refusal to let the Israelites go. We read: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt — darkness that can be felt.’ So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.”¹ What was darkness for Egypt was light for Israel. When God led Israel into the desert, it became a place where they were provided for and fed supernaturally. God’s presence made all the difference. But Israel decided to break lose. The Hebrew word used is *ruwd*, which literally means: “to roam.” *The King James Version* renders it sometimes “to be lord.” It is usually found in a context of rebellion, as in Isaac’s blessing for Esau: “You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you *grow restless*, you will throw his yoke from off your neck.”² *The King James Version* reads here: “And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou *shalt have the dominion*, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.”

There are some things in a woman’s life that cannot be forgotten because they are representative of certain special moments. It would be impossible for a girl to go to her wedding without a wedding dress and some jewelry. Jeremiah uses two words *’adiy* and *qishshur*. The first may be any kind of ornament; the second probably refers to a special ornamental girdle that indicates that the girl is married. *Qishshur* is only found twice in all of Scripture. Isaiah uses it in: “In that day the Lord will snatch away their finery: the bangles and headbands and crescent necklaces, the earrings and bracelets and veils, the headdresses and ankle chains and *sashes*, the perfume bottles and charms, the signet rings and nose rings, the fine robes and the capes and cloaks, the purses and mirrors, and the linen garments and tiaras and shawls.”³ The idea is that what Judah has done in forsaking the Lord is against her very nature. The picture John draws in Revelation of Babylon comes to mind. We read: “Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This

1. Ex. 10:21-23

2. Gen. 27:40

3. Isa. 3:18-23

title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.”¹ Again, although the wording suggests sexual immorality, the actual sins committed are spiritual. Judah has turned into a nation of violence in which criminal behavior was the rule of the day. Speaking about the reign of Manasseh, God said: “Manasseh led Judah and the people of Jerusalem astray, so that they did more evil than the nations the LORD had destroyed before the Israelites.”²

Crimes were committed openly in that innocent people were executed. If someone broke in a person’s house in the dark and was hit in the dark and killed by the owner of the house, the owner was not guilty. The Law of Moses stated: “If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed; but if it happens after sunrise, he is guilty of bloodshed.”³ That clause was used as a pretext for vicious murder. Where the presence of God is denied there will be a rise in crime. The Gospel tends to bring the crime rate down.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on v.35: “Past atrocities in the days of Manasseh are conveniently overlooked as the people protest their innocence of such things. Josiah’s reforms seem to have been short-lived, and the condemnations of this verse reflect the obduracy and wantonness of the Judean people, who were still idolaters at heart. For this they would be brought to judgment, not for outward compliance with religious reform. The Christian needs to pay constant attention to personal motivation, remembering the kind of God with whom he has to deal.”

Judah swung around from one side to the other looking for protection of her small territory. Some Bible scholars believe that there were two political parties in Jerusalem, one that looked to Assyria for help and the other to Egypt. Historically, it seems difficult to pinpoint the date of this prophecy. If these words were spoken during the reign of Josiah, there probably was still a political alliance with Assyria, which makes the reference to Assyria as an ally of the past difficult to understand. King Ahaz had experienced disappointment in his alliance with Assyria,⁴ but that was past history of about one century earlier. The world power to deal with as a balance against the Babylonian threat seems to have been Egypt in the days of Josiah. Politics and religion rarely mix. International relations of nations are governed alliances with countries that are driven by their own interests, not by neighborly love. To have confidence in political treaties, believing that they will provide help in times of need, is naïve. The Psalmist warns: “Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the LORD, who remains faithful forever.”⁵ But which nation would think of putting its trust in an alliance with God? That would go against the separation of church and state!

5. A plea to Israel 3:1-5

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

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1. Rev. 17:3-6
 2. II Chron. 33:9
 3. Ex. 22:2,3
 4. II Chron. 28:16-21
 5. Ps. 146:3-6

2 “Look up to the barren heights and see. Is there any place where you have not been ravished? By the roadside you sat waiting for lovers, sat like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and wickedness.

3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and no spring rains have fallen. Yet you have the brazen look of a prostitute; you refuse to blush with shame.

4 Have you not just called to me: ‘My Father, my friend from my youth,

5 will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?’ This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can.”

The Hebrew text of 3:1 has the introductory word *lee'mor*, rendered “they say” in most older versions. Bible scholars have argued about the meaning of this, believing that a copying error is involved. *The New International Version* circumvents the problem by simply omitting the word. The law forbade a woman to return to her first husband from whom she had been divorced. We read: “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.”¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The argument is founded on the law of ... Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which forbade an Israelite who had divorced his wife to take her again, if in the interval she had been married to another. The Jews had broken a still more sacred tie, not once only, but repeatedly; they worshipped ‘gods many and lords many;’ so that they had no longer any claim on Jehovah in virtue of his ‘covenant’ with his people.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* adds however: “The ground of this gracious willingness, on God’s part to receive them again, if they will ‘return’ to Him, is that Yahweh ‘remembers His own everlasting covenant with’ Israel even though she has broken the covenant; cf. Ezek 16:51,58,60. God has put away Israel by a temporary separation for her unfaithfulness, not by a permanent divorce; Isa 50:1, ‘Where is the bill of your, mother’s divorcement, whom I have put away?’ ”

The argument of these five verses, however, seems to be that return to God would be a legal impossibility. The image used is not merely one of a married woman committing adultery, but of one becoming a prostitute. Jeremiah, or rather God, asks the question how any man could take such a woman back. Humanly speaking that would be impossible, not just because the law forbids it but because emotionally it would be out of the question.

What then is the purpose of the text? If repentance and restoration are impossible, why bring up the subject? As in the case of Hosea, whose wife Gomer never gave up prostitution even after her marriage to the prophet, God is not willing to give up His people and close the case. Yet, God said by mouth of Hosea: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man — the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.”² But the Lord wants His people to know the enormity of their sin, so they come under conviction and to real repentance. Return to God may be a legal impossibility, but what is impossible to man is possible with God.

It seems impractical to treat these four chapters as one. We will therefore look at them one by one.

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1. Deut. 24:1-4
 2. Hos. 11:8,9

6. The guilt of the two sisters, Israel and Judah 3:6-18

6 During the reign of King Josiah, the LORD said to me, “Have you seen what faithless Israel has done? She has gone up on every high hill and under every spreading tree and has committed adultery there.

7 I thought that after she had done all this she would return to me but she did not, and her unfaithful sister Judah saw it.

8 I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery.

9 Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.

10 In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense,” declares the LORD.

11 The LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah.

12 Go, proclaim this message toward the north: “‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,’ declares the LORD, ‘I will not be angry forever.

13 Only acknowledge your guilt — you have rebelled against the LORD your God, you have scattered your favors to foreign gods under every spreading tree, and have not obeyed me,”“ declares the LORD.

14 “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband. I will choose you — one from a town and two from a clan — and bring you to Zion.

15 Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

16 In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,” declares the LORD, “men will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.

17 At that time they will call Jerusalem The Throne of the LORD, and all nations will gather in Jerusalem to honor the name of the LORD. No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts.

18 In those days the house of Judah will join the house of Israel, and together they will come from a northern land to the land I gave your forefathers as an inheritance.

Although the time of this prophecy is given as “During the reign of King Josiah,” it is not stated at what point in Josiah’s reign. As we saw earlier, Josiah went through various stages in his efforts to bring revival to the kingdom of Judah. The deportation of the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom was already ancient history, having occurred 94 years earlier. God’s question to Jeremiah: “Have you seen what faithless Israel has done?” is an indication that the details must have been well known in Josiah’s day. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “The contents of the whole discourse may be summed up in two thoughts: 1. Israel is not to remain always rejected, as pharisaic Judah imagined; 2. Judah is not to be always spared. When Jeremiah entered upon his office Israel had been in exile for 94 years, and all hope for the restoration of the banished people seemed to have vanished. But Judah, instead of taking warning by the judgment that had fallen upon the ten tribes, and instead of seeing in the downfall of the sister people the prognostication of its own, was only confirmed by it in its delusion, and held its own continued existence to be a token that against it, as the people of God, no judgment of wrath could come. This delusion must be destroyed by the announcement of Israel’s future reinstatement.”

God compares Israel’s guilt, which brought about her captivity, with the guilt of Judah, and He concludes that Judah was actually more corrupt than Israel had ever been. God had “divorced” Israel, which He had not done with Judah. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “The argument is as follows: Israel had been guilty of apostasy, and therefore God had put her away. Unwarned by this example her more guilty sister Judaea persists in the same sins (Jer 3:6-11). Israel therefore is invited to, return to the marriage-covenant by repentance (Jer 3:12-14), in which case she and Judah, accepted upon the like condition, shall become joint

members of a spiritual theocracy. (Jer 3:15-18). The repentance which God requires must be real (Jer 3:19-4:4).”

Israel’s sin was called “the sin of the house of Jeroboam.” Jeroboam had broken with God’s revelation in that he chose another place to worship God than the place God had chosen and he made two statues of golden calves, saying: “It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”¹ From there to the worship of Baal and other despicable idols was a small step. Judah never broke officially with God; they kept on going to the temple in Jerusalem, the place of God’s choice. But they used the outwardly correct form of worship as a cover for their widespread idolatry. That, among other things, made their sin greater than Israel’s.

God wanted Judah to learn from history. People who do not know their history have no future. Israel was meant to be an object lesson for Judah, but Judah completely failed to learn the lesson. V.9 reads in *The New International Version*: “Because Israel’s immorality mattered so little to her, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and wood.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and sticks.” All this describes the condition of Judah during the reign of King Josiah. Josiah loved the Lord and tried to bring the nation back to God, but there was no hunger and thirst for God at the grassroots.

The following message is addressed to the northern kingdom, which no longer existed. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “The ten tribes, carried to Assyria in 722 BC by Sargon II, are now addressed and informed that, though exiled, they should still repent, knowing that a merciful God whose anger can be appeased will not frown upon such behavior. While apostate Israel was assured that a reversion to covenantal relations could preface a return to the homeland, there is no evidence that the suggestion was ever taken seriously. Even the very framework of the confession was furnished, and all Israel had to do was to be sincere in conceding her rebellion, immorality and disobedience. True confession, unfortunately, is a harrowing and humiliating experience, and thus seldom encountered, whether in individuals or nations. The catharsis of confession undoubtedly helps to make Christian forgiveness so rich an experience for the penitent spirit (I Jn. 1:9). In instructing Israel to return to her Lord, Jeremiah shows God as the true *ba`al* (meaning ‘lord,’ ‘master,’ ‘husband’) of the nation. The idea of a return by ones and twos suggests the remnant of Isaiah 10:22; 28:5. This small company, paving the way for the Israel of God in later days, would return to Zion, the center from which, in New Testament times, the gospel of Christ spread, and which, in John’s apocalyptic vision, would be presented in renewed form as the spouse of the Savior (Rev. 21:2).”

What Israel lacked was a Daniel, who, when he realized that there was prophetic evidence that the Babylonian captivity was drawing to an end, gave himself to confession and repentance in behalf of the nation. We read: “In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”² Evidently, no one among the citizens of the northern kingdom felt any burden of personal or national guilt that would drive to such an act of repentance.

It is difficult for us to understand what will happen if we turn to God and say: “I am sorry!” It is like a hole in the dike that will result in a breakthrough of the sluices of heaven. The vision of such results that God communicates to Jeremiah is breathtaking. First, there will be a change in leadership. “I will give you shepherds after my own heart” is a reference to the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah predicted this earlier, saying: “In love a throne will be established; in faithfulness a man will sit on it — one from the house of David — one who in judging seeks justice and speeds the cause of righteousness.”³ And Jeremiah says in

1. See I Kings 12:28

2. Dan. 9:1-3

later chapters: “ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.’ ”¹ And “Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.”² And Ezekiel prophesied: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd.”³

A very remarkable part of this prophecy is the prediction of the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant. This means a radical change from an earthbound worship to a spiritual one. This is what Jesus told the Samaritan woman when He said: “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”⁴

We might interpret v.17 to mean that the revelation of God’s presence, which had been limited to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant, was being extended to the whole city of Jerusalem. But that would simply mean an extension of a physical presence, not a change from terrestrial to spiritual. It seems more logical to see in Jerusalem what will be called “The Throne of the LORD” the New Jerusalem in *Revelation*, the city that comes down from heaven to earth, the Bride of the Lamb, that shines with the glory of God. That city is built of living stones that are taken from the twelve tribes of Israel and from the church of Jesus Christ.⁵

The Promised Land which was the inheritance God gave to Israel also will then no longer consist of a piece of real estate east of the Mediterranean Sea, but it will be, in the words of the Apostle Peter, “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” As we read in Peter’s Epistle: “In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”⁶ And it will be for all nations that honor the Name of Yahweh.

7. The need for repentance 3:19-25

19 *“I myself said,” ‘How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.’ I thought you would call me ‘Father’ and not turn away from following me.*

20 *But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel,” declares the LORD.*

21 *A cry is heard on the barren heights, the weeping and pleading of the people of Israel, because they have perverted their ways and have forgotten the LORD their God.*

22 *“Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding.” “Yes, we will come to you, for you are the LORD our God.*

3. Isa. 16:5

1. Jer. 23:5

2. Jer. 30:9

3. Ezek. 34:23

4. John 4:21-24

5. See Rev. 21.

6. I Peter 1:3-5

23 Surely the [idolatrous] commotion on the hills and mountains is a deception; surely in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.

24 From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers' labor — their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters.

25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God."

Vv.19-25 could be called "a divine dream," "a vision never realized." Having shown the people a piece of heavenly glory, Jeremiah, under divine inspiration, returns to earth, trying to imagine what could happen. Vv.19 and 20 reveal God's emotions about Judah's backsliding. There is some mixing of metaphors in these verses that accentuates the emotional tone. Israel and Judah are depicted as sons who should call God their Father, but they are also the wife who is unfaithful to her husband. The image of the sons emphasizes the natural relationship between the people and God. God had adopted Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which made Israel and Judah His natural offspring. The image of the wife speaks of the intimacy of the relationship.

The fact that the vision of repentance was never realized was not due to God's impotence to bring it about but to Israel and Judah's unwillingness to repent. God can draw people to repentance, but He does not force them.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about vv.19-25 in general: "Although the prophet somehow feels that Israel's exile can be used to achieve the salvation of Judah, he points out that God's hopes for the southern kingdom were not realized, due to national apostasy and immorality." On vv.19-21 in particular, he states: "A look at the covenantal blessings reminds the Israelites of what they failed to receive through willful disobedience. Instead of promised blessings implemented by a loving heavenly Father, they suffered punishment for their apostasy. In the same way God's hopes for Judah have been thwarted because, like a woman playing false with her husband, she has merely paid lip service to covenantal ideals while pursuing immorality. In his mind Jeremiah hears from the north a plaintive voice *on the bar heights*. This phrase (*cf.* Je. 3:2; 4:11; 7:29; 12:12; 14:6) denotes naturally bare areas of land, and typifies the spiritual qualities of the pagan rituals conducted on hilltops. Such elevations were often used for mourning (*cf.* Jdg. 11:37), and it is this which the prophet hears. The mourners are lamenting the folly and futility of worship at Canaanite shrines up and down the land, and in this figure the locale of idolatry was fittingly the scene of penitence. In the spiritual life lost power can only be regained when the sinner retraces his steps to the point where he sinned, and seeks forgiveness and restoration with God."

V.21 prophetically describes Israel's repentance, which thus far never took place. Zechariah saw a similar scene of repentance and conversion, using the crucifixion of the Messiah as the point of focus. We read: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives."¹ John would later repeat this incident in *Revelation*, saying: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."² The difference between Jeremiah, Zechariah and John's vision is that Jeremiah focuses on the northern kingdom of Israel,

1. Zech. 12:10-14

2. Rev. 1:7

Zechariah has his eye on the southern kingdom and John sees “all the peoples of the earth” mourning because they failed to recognize the importance of the incarnation of God’s Son.

It is important to observe that the place where repentance takes place is the place where the sin was committed. Israel committed idolatry on “the barren heights.” Repentance always focuses on particulars. When Isaiah saw God, he cried: “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”¹

As far as we know, of the ten tribes that were taken into captivity none ever returned to Canaan, which means that Jeremiah’s vision was never literally fulfilled. But if we look at John’s vision in *Revelation*, which makes repentance worldwide, we understand that it includes Jeremiah’s prophecy.

V.22 contains God’s invitation and Israel’s response. The words “faithless” and “backsliding” are closely related in Hebrew. The first is *showbab* and the second *meshuwbah*, both sounding alike and having basically the same meaning of “turning away.” The verse reveals that the only way a person can overcome sin is by God’s healing touch. Israel would be unable to come back to God if God would not heal their backsliding. The Apostle Paul puts this in New Testament language, saying: “If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”²

The Hebrew text of v.23 reads literally: “Truly, in vain [is salvation hoped for] from the hills and from the multitudes of mountains: truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel.” The addition in brackets and “the multitudes of mountains” shows that something is missing in the verse.

The Pulpit Commentary calls it: “An obscure and (if corruption exists anywhere) corrupt passage, which, however, it is hopeless to attempt to emend, as the corruption consists partly in wrong letters, partly in omitted letters or words (or both).” The commentary continues: “Moreover, the text employed by the Septuagint appears to have presented the same difficulty. The latter point is especially noteworthy. It is far from proving that the traditional text is correct; what it does suggest is that the writings of the prophets were at first written down in a very insecure manner. The rendering of the Authorized Version is substantially that of Hitzig, who explains ‘the multitude of [the] mountains,’ as meaning ‘the multitude of gods worshipped on the mountains’ —too forced an expression for so simple a context. It seems most natural to suppose ... a contrast between the wild, noisy cultus of idolatrous religions, and the quiet spiritual worship inculcated by the prophets. Compare by way of illustration, the loud and ostentatious demonstrations of Baal’s ritual in 1 Kings 18 with the sober, serious attitude of Elijah in the same chapter. The word rendered in the Authorized Version ‘multitude’ has a still more obvious and original meaning, viz. ‘tumult;’ and probably the Targum is not far from the true sense in rendering, ‘In vain have we worshipped upon the hills and not for profit have we raised a tumult on the mountains.’ ” We see that *The New International Version* interprets the verse in the way *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests.

The Hebrew word, rendered “in vain” is *sheqer*, meaning: “a sham.” Job uses the word describing his friends, saying: “You, however, smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you!”³ Idolatry is based on Satan’s lies, whom Jesus calls “a murderer and the father of lies.”⁴

There is a strong resemblance between Jeremiah’s attitude of repentance in behalf of the kingdom of Israel and Daniel’s intercessory prayer at the end of the Babylonian captivity. Both prophets identify themselves with the nation as a whole and confess their sins as if they had committed them personally.

The Hebrew text of v.24 does not contain the word “idol.” It reads literally: “For shame has devoured the labor of our fathers’ from our youth; their flocks and their herds, their sons and their

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1. Isa. 6:5
 2. Rom. 8:13,14
 3. Job 13:4
 4. John 8:44

daughters.” Both Jeremiah and Daniel use the Hebrew word *bosheth*. It means: “shame” and refers to the feeling and the condition, as well as its cause, which explains that the reference here is to an idol. Daniel’s prayer also contains the word *bosheth*, but there the reference to an idol statue is less clear. We read: “Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with *shame* — the men of Judah and people of Jerusalem and all Israel, both near and far, in all the countries where you have scattered us because of our unfaithfulness to you. O LORD, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with *shame* because we have sinned against you.”¹

Jeremiah implies that Israel’s idolatry required human sacrifices. Sons and daughters were sacrificed as well as flocks and herds.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments here: “Jeremiah sees clearly what Judah has yet to learn through the harsh experience of captivity, *i.e.* that friendship of the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4:4), and that the carnal mind is a particular threat to the believer in all ages (Rom. 8:7). Hence the prophet belabors his generation for their abhorrent Baal worship, described as *the shameful thing* (RSV), or more explicitly, *Baal, god of shame* (NEB). The pre-exilic prophets consistently regarded Canaanite worship as Israel’s great shame (*cf.* Ho. 9:10). Jeremiah states flatly that continuance in this way of life will bring ruin on the nation, and that what was so avidly sought for as a way of life will be seen ultimately to have been sin all along. The consequences of obedience to unrighteousness for both Jew and Gentile are state in Romans 2:8f.”

8. The prospect of unconditional return 4:1-4

1 *“If you will return, O Israel, return to me,” declares the LORD. “If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray,*

2 *and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory.”*

3 *This is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem: “Break up your unplowed ground and do not sow among thorns.*

4 *Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.*

In Hebrew the vv.1 and 2 form one single sentence. The text reads literally: “If you want to return, [to the land] O Israel, then return to me, says the LORD and if you will put away your abominations out of my sight then you shall not remove and you shall swear the Lord lives, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless in Him and in Him shall they glory.”

The invitation for Israel to return is not in the first place to come back from captivity to Canaan, but to restore fellowship with God. In order to do so they must do two things: renounce their idol worship and live a life that is consistent with serving the Lord. The latter is expressed as “swearing by the Lord,” that is practice truth. Such a conversion would inevitably bring them back to the place God had given for them to live. It would not only benefit themselves, but it would bring God’s blessing upon all the nations of this world. They would again be what God had meant them to be, namely a kingdom of priests, people who would represent God to the world and bring the world to God. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments here: “The people are therefore required to take a new oath by the life of the Lord *in truth, justice and uprightness* as an indication of genuine repentance. It would have to be sworn truthfully – otherwise it would constitute blasphemy – and in effect would comprise a renewal of the Sinai promises. On this basis God pledges to implement the provisos of the ancient covenant, and thus will again be able to use His people

1. Dan. 9:7,8

in the evangelization of the nations, since it is through Israel that the latter will *bless themselves* (cf. Gn. 18:18; Is. 2:3; 65:16).”

Since the ten tribes were no longer living in Canaan when Jeremiah pronounced these words, it is doubtful that the prophecy ever reached them. That fact suggests that the intended audience is actually Judah. It was primarily for their benefit that these words were spoken.

Hosea had used similar words approximately 100 years earlier, saying: “Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap the fruit of unending love, and break up your unplowed ground; for it is time to seek the LORD, until he comes and showers righteousness on you.”¹ The words evoke the picture Jesus painted in *The Parable of the Sower*. It is the condition of the soil that determines how well the seed will grow. Particularly the mention of sowing among the thorns is well explained in Jesus’ parable. We read: “Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants,” and “The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.”² It was “the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth” that made the heart of Judah ripe for the Babylonian captivity. David’s formula to dwell in the land is: “Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart.”³

Circumcision of the heart refers to a decision to dedicate one’s most intimate life to the control of the Holy Spirit. Proof of being a Jew was to be circumcised physically. It was understood that there ought to be a spiritual relationship with God, but that was not the automatic result of the performed ritual. As the Apostle Paul observes, circumcision without obedience to the law annuls the ritual. We read in Romans: “Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”⁴

Although the text reads: “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts,” we cannot circumcise our own hearts. Physical circumcision is an operation one does not perform on oneself; it is done by someone else. The same is true about spiritual circumcision. If God does not bring about the transformation within us it cannot be done. But God only circumcises those who ask for it. We have to sign the consent. In later chapters, Jeremiah explains what is involved in this change. We read: “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.”⁵ And: “I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.”⁶

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1. Hos. 10:12
 2. Matt. 13:7, 22
 3. Ps. 37:3,4
 4. Rom. 2:25-29
 5. Jer. 24:7
 6. Jer. 32:39,40

In a way, the same is true about plowing the soil. Soil does not plow itself; if the farmer does not do it, it will not be done. It takes a confession and a request to be broken for God to make the transformation needed to be pleasing to Him. We can only escape the wrath of God by asking for forgiveness.

Moses put the need for this spiritual circumcision in context by placing it against the background of God’s greatness and the greatness of His grace toward the people. We read: “To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the LORD set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.”¹ The mention of God’s love for the alien emphasizes the universality of God’s grace and the role He wanted Israel to play in order to demonstrate it. Those who were meant to be a role model for the world became the epitome of corruption.

9. The coming judgment upon Judah 4:5-22

5 “Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: ‘Sound the trumpet throughout the land!’ Cry aloud and say: ‘Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!’

6 Raise the signal to go to Zion! Flee for safety without delay! For I am bringing disaster from the north, even terrible destruction.”

7 A lion has come out of his lair; a destroyer of nations has set out. He has left his place to lay waste your land. Your towns will lie in ruins without inhabitant.

8 So put on sackcloth, lament and wail, for the fierce anger of the LORD has not turned away from us.

9 “In that day,” declares the LORD, “the king and the officials will lose heart, the priests will be horrified, and the prophets will be appalled.”

10 Then I said, “Ah, Sovereign LORD, how completely you have deceived this people and Jerusalem by saying, ‘You will have peace,’ when the sword is at our throats.”

11 At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, “A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse;

12 a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them.”

13 Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined!

14 O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbor wicked thoughts?

15 A voice is announcing from Dan, proclaiming disaster from the hills of Ephraim.

16 “Tell this to the nations, proclaim it to Jerusalem: ‘A besieging army is coming from a distant land, raising a war cry against the cities of Judah.

17 They surround her like men guarding a field, because she has rebelled against me,’” declares the LORD.

18 “Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you. This is your punishment. How bitter it is! How it pierces to the heart!”

19 Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry.

1. Deut. 10:14-22

20 Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment.

21 How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?

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

Barnes’ Notes introduces this whole section with the observation: “A group of prophecies now commences, extending to Jer 10:25, but broken at the beginning of Jer 7 by a new heading. The subject of them all is the same, namely, the approaching devastation of Judea by a hostile army in punishment of its persistence in idolatry. The prophecy of Jer 7 was probably written in the first year of Jehoiakim, while as regards the rest they probably extended over a considerable period of time. This group, which we may reasonably believe to have come down to us much as it stood in Jehoiakim’s scroll, gives us a general view of the nature of Jeremiah’s efforts during that important period, when under Josiah a national reformation was still possible, and the exile might have been averted. The prophecy (Jer 7), spoken in the first year of Jehoiakim, when the probation of Judah was virtually over, was the solemn closing of the appeal to the conscience of the people, and a protest, while the new king was still young upon his throne, against that ruinous course upon which he so immediately entered.”

There is in the announcement of judgment in vv. 5-9 an element of irony, or even sarcasm. Jeremiah foretells the Babylonian invasion of Judah that will end in the captivity of the people. The people will react to this by building up their fortifications. But King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem by patiently waiting till the hunger killed off its inhabitants. Judah did more than physically flee to their bunkers, they threw up embankments and built forts to hold out against the Lord. The Babylonian invasion and captivity could have been avoided if the people had surrendered to God. They did not want to do that. That makes their blowing of the trumpet a sham. It is this note of inconsistency that explains Jeremiah’s frustration in v.10.

The one who actually blows the trumpet here is Jeremiah, the prophet. This means that it is in fact God who sounds the alarm, warning the people to prepare themselves for the judgment to come. When God announces judgment it is always an act of grace, giving people the chance to escape by repentance. *The Book of Jonah* illustrates this principle.

Most Bible scholars agree on the lion in v.7 being the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, but some have argued for the Assyrian Empire or even the Scythians. The power represented here by the lion is the same Jeremiah saw earlier as a boiling pot, tilting away from the north.”¹ There is behind this image of the lion another higher power of which the Apostle Peter says: “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith.”² The battle is ultimately not between Judah and Babylon but between God and Satan, light and darkness.

At the same time the anger of this lion represents the anger of the Lord. This is obvious from Jeremiah’s suggestion in v.8 that repentance would avert the coming destruction. In Old Testament days natural disasters and military defeats were always seen in connection with the moral failures of a nation. This relationship is rarely recognized in modern times. We no longer believe that ten righteous men could mean the protection of a city. In New York City there were undoubtedly more than ten faithful believers in Jesus Christ who took sanctification seriously when the airplanes hit the World Trade Center in 9/11, and yet it happened. Some who saw in it God’s punishment for the gay lifestyle of some people in the United States were labeled as bigots. Although that proposed reason for the disaster may have been uncalled for, a voice calling for repentance from sin would have been appropriate and was not or little heard. There is a fine line between living a life that gears itself to the will of God and the expectation of God’s protection of all danger that cannot always be drawn clearly. But God has given us promises that give us the assurance that

1. Jer. 1:13

2. I Peter 5:8,9

whatever happens to us physically or economically, the end will be secure. We read in the Psalms: “If you make the Most High your dwelling — even the LORD, who is my refuge — then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent. For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.”¹

For Judah the situation was clear. God told them what would happen if they did not repent of their sins and return to Him. To us Jesus states clearly that following Him through life on earth can be painful and difficult, but the alternative, however easy it looks, is infinitely worse. He says: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”² There is a wide gate and a broad road, but they lead to destruction.³

V.10 mentions the three classes of the ruling hierarchy that will be completely dumfounded by the ruin of the country. The king and his cabinet will realize that they followed the wrong policy of alliances with world powers that did not give them the protection they expected. The priests failed to stand in the gap and be the bridge between God and people as they were supposed to be. And the prophets, especially those who had announced that all would be well, find themselves to be false prophets. The latter discovery is what bothers Jeremiah particularly because, in reevaluating his role in all of this, he faces doubts that trouble his soul.

As it stands here v.10 is difficult to explain. It is as if Jeremiah holds God responsible for messages the false prophets had proclaimed. According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, *The Targum* paraphrases this verse, “And I said, Receive my supplication, O Lord God; for, behold, the false prophets deceive this people and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace.” The verse reveals some of Jeremiah’s struggle of soul as we find it repeated throughout his book. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “Jeremiah had constantly to struggle against the misgivings of his own melancholy nature, but he never let them prevent him from doing his duty.” God never allowed His prophets to prophesy without having them experience the contents of their message in their own life. Isaiah’s “For how long, O Lord?”⁴ Ezekiel’s physical experience of the siege of Jerusalem,⁵ and Hosea’s marriage with the prostitute Gomer⁶ are clear examples. Jeremiah was torn between his patriotism and his faith, between allegiance to the nation of which he was a member and people he loved on the one hand, and to God on the other. Eventually, he had to learn that his pain was a shadow of the pain God feels for a lost world.

The Hebrew word rendered “deceived” is *nasha’*, meaning “to lead astray,” or “to delude.” The first time it is used in Scripture is in the verse: “Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’ ”⁷ The message of peace was, of course, not God’s message to the nation; it was what the false prophets preached. Jeremiah would expose this in later chapters, saying: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.”⁸ What puzzled him was the fact that God allowed those false prophets to keep on preaching. Why does God allow the enemy to sow tares on His field?⁹ God does not tell us why, nor does He owe us an explanation.

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1. Ps. 91:9-12
 2. John 16:33
 3. Matt. 7:13
 4. Isa. 6:11
 5. Ezek. Ch. 4,5
 6. Hos. Ch. 1,3
 7. Gen. 3:13

 8. Jer. 6:14; 8:11
 9. Matt. 13:24-29, 37-43

The coming Babylonian invasion is compared to a desert storm. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, says: “The sirocco, a scorching wind from the desert, becomes a metaphor of destruction. As it sweeps in it withers vegetation and makes human existence almost unbearable.” There is, however, a hidden redemptive feature in the wording of this verse. Wind was used to winnow, separating the wheat from the chaff. Predicting Peter’s denial, Jesus used the same image, saying: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.”¹ The suggestion in Jeremiah’s message is that there is no wheat left to redeem. All have become chaff.

The verdict in v.11, Hebrew *mishpat*, which is a word sometimes used to describe the law of God, as in: “I will praise you with an upright heart as I learn your *righteous laws*.”² That verdict is not final at this point, since it is followed by a call for repentance, indicating that it can still be avoided. The verdict is given in the form of a vision of the Babylonian army that sweeps over the country like a desert storm, leaving a trail of destruction behind. Since Judah, like Israel before, has withdrawn herself from God’s protection, God allows the enemy to handle them.

The scene reminds us of John’s vision at the end of times when a host of demonic power sweeps over the earth and brings about devastation upon all those who do not have the seal of God. John describes this “first woe” as: “And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.”³

V.14 is Jeremiah’s call for repentance for the city of Jerusalem. The city is called upon to cleanse themselves from her evil practices and leave her *wicked thoughts*. The Hebrew uses the words “vain thoughts,” *machashabah* ‘*aven*, which can also be rendered “thoughts of idolatry.” The verse clearly indicates that the source of sin is in the heart and the mind. The Apostle James defines the process clearly, saying: “Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”⁴

The Pulpit Commentary states about “Thy vain thoughts”: “The phrase specially belongs to sins against one’s neighbor — such sins as are described in ... Jeremiah 7:5-9 ... ‘Vain’ should rather be ‘wicked’ (immoral); the root-meaning of the noun is ‘a breath’ (the symbol of material or moral emptiness).”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: “Since the promised punishment will only become absolute upon continued apostasy, there is still time for Judah to repent and be healed, a situation which illustrates the conditional nature of the prophecies of destruction. The coming devastation is heralded from the northern limits of the land (*cf.* Dt. 34:1), and echoed from a point just ten miles north of Jerusalem. Ample warning of the calamity has now been given, and the verbs of verse 15 demonstrate clearly the urgency of the matter. To *declare* the menace is merely to announce it as an item of news; to *proclaim* it is to publish it so forcefully that all must take notice.”

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1. Luke 22:31,32
 2. Ps. 119:7
 3. Rev. 9:3-11
 4. James 1:14,15

The heart is again mentioned in v.18, where the Hebrew reads literally: “It is bitter because it reaches unto your heart.” When the soul turns bitter, life has lost its zest.

This bitterness is not merely the experience of those who have brought this disaster upon themselves. In the following verses Jeremiah describes the struggle of his own soul in regards to the prophecy he pronounced. *The New International Version* reads v.19: “Oh, my anguish, my anguish!” *The New King James Version*: “O my soul, my soul!” *The King James Version*: “My bowels, my bowels!” The Hebrew word used is *me`ah*, which has a wide variety of meaning, from intestines, to abdomen, stomach, the uterus, male organs, to the heart. The word is used in God’s promise to Abraham: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own *body* will be your heir.”¹ Another use is found in the verse: “The LORD said to [Rebecca], ‘Two nations are in your *womb*, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.’”² We also find it in: “Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab’s hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his *intestines* spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died.”³ And in the sense in which Jeremiah uses it, we find it in the verse: “I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my *heart*.”⁴

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: “Jeremiah can contain his feelings no longer, and cries out in deep sorrow at the prospect of destruction. For AV *bowels* RSV reads *my anguish*. In Hebrew thought the intestines were the locale of the emotions, and in modern psychosomatic medical research they have been similarly described as ‘the sounding-board of the entire emotional system.’ The MT reads *walls of my heart* for AV *very heart* and NEB *throbbing of my heart*. The MT *my heart moans (hnh) inside me* point to a profoundly disturbed physical condition due to shock. The prophet’s experience will soon become that of the entire nation. ... One calamity now follows on the heels of another. There is no escape, for everything is devastated in a moment, as though by fire. The prophet wonders anxiously how much longer he can stand the emotional strain of contemplating his countrymen streaming to the fortified towns for refuge and quivering with terror at the warning trumpet blasts, for he knows that the latter will be of no uncertain import.”

Jeremiah’s anguish and agony are reflections of God’s grief over the city and the people. Jesus expressed the same emotions, as we read in Luke’s Gospel: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’”⁵ God’s wrath is in continuous conflict with God’s compassion and those who are intimate with Him experience some of that emotion.

It makes little difference whether we read v.22 as God’s verdict over the people or as Jeremiah’s opinion. The verse does not say that the people are not smart, but that they use their intelligence for the wrong goals in life. Jesus must have had these words in mind when He told the parable of the dishonest manager. He held up this crook as an example of shrewdness in pursuing the wrong goals, recommending that we pursue the right goals in life with the same zeal. We read: “The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light. I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.”⁶ The Apostle Paul turns this around, yet

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1. Gen. 15:4
 2. Gen. 25:23
 3. II Sam. 20:10
 4. Ps. 40:8
 5. Luke 19:41-44

keeping the same application, saying: “I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.”¹ The moral of this for us is that our goal in life must be to love the LORD our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength.²

10. The heralding of desolation 4:23-31

23 I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty; and at the heavens, and their light was gone.

24 I looked at the mountains, and they were quaking; all the hills were swaying.

25 I looked, and there were no people; every bird in the sky had flown away.

26 I looked, and the fruitful land was a desert; all its towns lay in ruins before the LORD, before his fierce anger.

27 This is what the LORD says: “The whole land will be ruined, though I will not destroy it completely.

28 Therefore the earth will mourn and the heavens above grow dark, because I have spoken and will not relent, I have decided and will not turn back.”

29 At the sound of horsemen and archers every town takes to flight. Some go into the thickets; some climb up among the rocks. All the towns are deserted; no one lives in them.

30 What are you doing, O devastated one? Why dress yourself in scarlet and put on jewels of gold? Why shade your eyes with paint? You adorn yourself in vain. Your lovers despise you; they seek your life.

31 I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child — the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, “Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section as follows: “In one of the most magnificent lyrical passages in the entire prophecy, Jeremiah experiences a dramatic moment of insight concerning the outpouring of divine anger upon Judah. So devastating is the judgment upon Judah (23–28) that Jeremiah instinctively thinks of the state of primeval chaos (Gn. 1:2), except that what then became ‘good’ will now be turned to desolation at the divine presence. This description is one of the most dramatic of its kind in the entire Old Testament. The heedless destruction consequent upon apostasy has brought ruin upon the land, and the skies are darkened in mourning (*cf.* Is. 24:10; 34:11). The imagery is that of the judgment day (*cf.* Is. 13:10; Joel 2:10; 3:15; Am. 8:9 etc.) which had now arrived in all its terror, eclipsing the celestial luminaries and making the earth return to its primitive barrenness before the creative word emerged (*cf.* 2 Pet. 3:10).”

For the sake of clarity we copy the embedded Scripture references in the above quotation:

- “The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred.”³
- “The desert owl and screech owl will possess it; the great owl and the raven will nest there. God will stretch out over Edom the measuring line of chaos and the plumb line of desolation.”⁴
- “The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.”⁵
- “Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.”⁶

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- 6. Luke 16:8,9
 - 1. Rom. 16:19
 - 2. Deut. 6:4
 - 3. Isa. 24:10
 - 4. Isa. 34:11
 - 5. Isa. 13:10

- “The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.”¹
- “ ‘In that day,’ declares the Sovereign LORD, ‘I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.’ ”²
- “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”³

Four times in these four verses we find the words “I looked.” Since the LORD is mentioned in v.26 as a third person, we may assume that the “I” is Jeremiah. God gave him a vision of the total devastation of the land human sin would bring about. These verses lend greater credibility to the theory that states that there is a gap between the first two verses of Genesis. That between “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” and “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”⁴ the fall of Lucifer took place, which brought God’s perfect creation into a condition of barrenness. Human sin achieves here what Satan’s rebellion had accomplished before.

The Pulpit Commentary remarks about Jeremiah’s vision: “He foresees the utter desolation into which not only the land of Judah, **but the earth** in general, will be brought, and which reminds him of nothing so much as the ‘waste and wild’ condition of the earth previous to the first creative word. But why is ‘the earth’ mentioned in this connection? Because the judgment upon Judah is but one act in the great general judgment which, when completed, will issue in a fresh order of things.” It must be concluded that Jeremiah’s vision of the condition of the Promised Land after the Babylonian invasion makes it an image of the condition of our planet on the Day of Judgment. It also foreshadows the crucifixion. Specifically the destruction of the temple and the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant reflect the moment at which Jesus cried out “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”- which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”⁵

We may assume that Jeremiah’s vision of doom was not just words on paper but that he made them in public statements. He wanted to show his hearers the consequences of their sinful life. He wanted to project on the screen of their minds images of a scorched earth after the enemy had moved through. The land of milk and honey would become a desert. In turning back the film, the frame would not only stop at the place where Israel was before entering Canaan, but where creation was before God spoke the creative Word: “Let there be light!”⁶ If sinners on earth could take one glance in hell, it might shock them enough to turn around and cry out to God for salvation. That is probably the reason Jesus made more mention of hell than He spoke of heaven. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man turned instantly into the evangelist he had never been on earth.⁷

In vv.27 and 28 the Lord speaks a message which is probably for Jeremiah’s ears only. It is meant to lessen the agony of the prophet’s soul. As with Isaiah, God shows His prophet that although the tree is felled, it is not dead: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.”⁸ The cutting of the tree, the complete destruction, the final blow to sin, will take place on the cross of

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- 6. Joel 2:10
 - 1. Joel 3:15
 - 2. Amos 8:9
 - 3. II Peter 3:10
 - 4. See Gen. 1:1-2
 - 5. Matt. 27:46
 - 6. Gen. 1:3
 - 7. See Luke 16:19-31.

Calvary. “From the sixth hour until the ninth hour darkness came over all the land. About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?’ - which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’”¹ God would do that to Himself, not to man He had created in His image.

V.29 describes the reaction of the city dwellers to the news of the approaching invasion. People leave Jerusalem to hide in the woods. *The New International Version* uses the word “thickets” for the Hebrew word *ab*. In most cases the word is translated “cloud,” as in: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘I am going to come to you in a *dense cloud*, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.’”² The idea seems to be more that the people go in hiding than that they go to a specific place. When the actual Babylonian invasion took place the people did not leave the city, but closed the gates, trying to outlive the siege. The hiding, therefore, may suggest more hiding from the Lord than going to a hiding place. V.30 fits that thought in describing the city as a prostitute, committing idolatry, more than adultery.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, remarks here: “Again Jerusalem’s behavior is questioned, this time under the imagery of feminine wiles. In the midst of ruin the prophet sees a woman clothed in scarlet, who like the Babylon of the apocalyptic vision (Rev. 17:4) was full of abominations and filthy fornication. But this is Zion, not sinful Shinar, the house of all evil (*cf.* Zc. 5:11), which is still playing the harlot by her idolatry. At the eleventh hour Jerusalem is trying hard to placate the enemy by alluring them in the manner of a prostitute. Though she has accentuated the beauty of her eyes by some cosmetic substance such as stibium, she still cannot gain favor in the eyes of her lovers. Destruction and desolation as a consequence of sin are inevitable because Zion is still looking for adulterous paramours such as Egypt and Assur (*cf.* 2:33f.) instead of clinging to her true spouse (*cf.* 3:1). Through her behavior in courting lovers Judah has become tainted with a mortal disease, and by using the figure of a fatal miscarriage the prophet depicts the nation moribund and gasping spasmodically with arms outstretched, ‘Help, the murderers have killed me.’ Like the wanton she has been, Judah is now paying the price for her iniquity.”

11. The depravity of Jerusalem 5:1-9

1 “Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. If you can find but one person who deals honestly and seeks the truth, I will forgive this city.

2 Although they say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ still they are swearing falsely.”

3 O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth? You struck them, but they felt no pain; you crushed them, but they refused correction. They made their faces harder than stone and refused to repent.

4 I thought, “These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God.

5 So I will go to the leaders and speak to them; surely they know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God.” But with one accord they too had broken off the yoke and torn off the bonds.

6 Therefore a lion from the forest will attack them, a wolf from the desert will ravage them, a leopard will lie in wait near their towns to tear to pieces any who venture out, or their rebellion is great and their backslidings many.

7 “Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes.

8 They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man’s wife.

9 Should I not punish them for this?” declares the LORD. “Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?”

8. Isa. 11:1

1. Matt. 27:45,46

2. Ex. 19:9

The Pulpit Commentary observes here: “Gladly would Jehovah pardon, if his people showed but a gleam of sound morality. But they are all deaf to the warning voice — the Law of God is flagrantly violated. In particular the marriage tie, as well the typical one between man and woman as the anti-typical between the people and its God, is openly disregarded.”

These verses are given in the form of a dialogue between God and Jeremiah. The opening verse reminds us of Abraham’s intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah.¹ In pleading with the Lord for the cities, Abraham asked God to spare the people for the sake of ten righteous men. God made it known that there were no righteous men at all in the city. As it turned out the angel could not have done his work of destruction if there had been one righteous person left. Pointing to the town of Zoar, he said to Lot: “But flee there quickly, because I cannot do anything until you reach it.”²

There is here more involved than a lesson in arithmetic. The principle that governed the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah and of Jerusalem is more complicated than that. We could easily question Lot’s righteousness. The Apostle Peter may have considered Lot to be righteous, “distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men,”³ but Lot’s testimony was such that his sons-in-law to be thought he was joking when he told them their city was going to be destroyed,⁴ and his wife and daughters did not consider him to be a model to be emulated.

The question is not either how righteous the righteous ought to be in order to be able to save a city. There were certainly several people in Jerusalem who took their fellowship with God seriously enough. Jeremiah undoubtedly did and when King Nebuchadnezzar took the first group of captives to Babylon, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, as well as Ezekiel were among them. Even intercessory prayer, as modeled by Abraham, has only limited effect. There is a point of no return, a point at which the measure of iniquity of a nation is full, when intercession ceases to be effective. We read in Ezekiel: “The word of the LORD came to me: ‘Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD.’ ”⁵

If Jeremiah is here the person ordered to do the search, he cannot judge the condition of the human heart. We suppose this section was still written during the reign of King Josiah in the period when revival was being preached and the symbols of idolatry were being destroyed. Under pressure from above people had returned to an outward observation of religious practices in the Name of Yahweh. This was reflected in their daily conversation in which they would say: “As surely as the LORD lives ...” The fact that they said this with their mouth and not with their wallet is what showed them to be spiritually unchanged. We may conclude that Josiah’s reformation had not affected the grassroots of the nation. The people had exchanged one outward ritual for another, but the enemy who had entrenched himself in the nation was not being uprooted.

In vv.3-6 Jeremiah is speaking to the Lord. The Hebrew text reads literally: “O LORD, are not your eyes upon the truth?” If God’s truth in us is merely skin deep it is not truth at all. And since skin is all we can see in looking at one another, we cannot judge. At the anointing ceremony of young David, Samuel first looked to one of David’s older brothers, but the Lord said to him: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the

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1. See Gen. 18:16-33.
 2. Gen. 19:22
 3. II Peter 2:6-8
 4. Gen. 19:14
 5. Ezek. 14:12-14,19,20

outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”¹ And in confessing his sin, David said to God: “Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.”² Only truth that is inside us is real truth.

Jeremiah does not elaborate on the kind of chastisement God applied to the people of Jerusalem before the actual judgment of captivity was meted out to them. God’s discipline may have been a partial withholding of His revelation. The spiritual climate was akin to that of the time when Samuel came upon the scene of Israel’s history, about which we read: “In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.”³ Before Israel became a kingdom, God had told Moses to put down, as part of the king’s job description, how to deal with the written Word. We read: “When [the king] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”⁴ As far as we know, none of Israel’s monarchs ever followed these instructions. When Josiah ascended the throne, the finding of the scroll of the law came as a complete surprise.⁵ *The Book of Proverbs* states: “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.”⁶

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “Their want of religious instruction is the cause of their faulty conduct. In fact, it was only after the return from Babylon that any popular schools were founded in Judea, and not till shortly before the destruction of the temple that the elementary instruction attained the regularity of a system.” That spiritual condition made Jeremiah believe that the general public behaved foolishly because they had not been taught the Word of God. He assumed that those who had received religious education would be different. What he found out was that the rebellion of the upper class was worse than among the lower class people. Obedience to God begins in the heart, not in the head. If we give our heart to the Lord our head will follow. Wrong thinking always follows wrong moral choices.

We find another instance of withholding divine revelation after the Pharisees accused Jesus of receiving His power from Satan. They said: “It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”⁷ From that point on Jesus began to teach in parables. When the disciples asked Him for the reason, He said: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’”⁸

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.4-6: “Jeremiah is inclined to excuse the poor because, being of lower social status, they could possibly be pardoned for their ignorance. Yet even the poor were supposed to know the law of God. When identical conditions occur among the upper classes, the prophet knows that they arise from a repudiation of God’s commands, not from ignorance. All had sinned in breaking the yoke of the law, and were like animals which had snapped the ties securing the heavy

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1. I Sam. 16:7
 2. Ps. 51:6
 3. I Sam. 3:1
 4. Deut. 17:18-20
 5. See II Chron. 34:14-21.
 6. Prov. 29:18
 7. Matt. 12:24
 8. Matt. 13:11-13

yoke to their necks. As the servants of sin they deemed themselves free from the righteousness of the law (*cf.* Rom. 6:20). Jeremiah, by contrast, desired them to be free from sin and become servants of righteousness (*cf.* Rom. 6:18). However, Judah’s preoccupation with sin will result in her destruction by lions, wolves and leopards, these animals symbolizing nations which had ravaged Israel periodically. In the pre-exilic period wild beasts were a real danger in parts of Canaan (*cf.* 2 Ki. 17:25). Here the nation is thought to be as defenseless as a city-dweller in a forest of wild animals.”

It does, however, require some insight into God’s revelation of Himself to refuse to obey the law of God. Judah’s sin was not merely based on ignorance of the will of God. Since the people sinned consciously, God refuses to pardon them, even though they may have continued to bring the required sacrifices. Their idolatry brought them to practice ritual sexual immorality, which was probably accompanied by adultery and fornication in their every day life. Hence the reference to brothels in v.7. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states about this kind of prostitution: “spiritually: idolatry in temples of idols; but literal prostitution is also included, being frequently part of idol worship – e.g., in the worship of the Babylonian Mylitta.”

Knowing the people that had made the desert crossing with him, Moses prophesied: “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; filled with food, he became heavy and sleek. He abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior. They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols. They sacrificed to demons, which are not God — gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear. You deserted the Rock, who fathered you; you forgot the God who gave you birth. The LORD saw this and rejected them because he was angered by his sons and daughters. ‘I will hide my face from them,’ he said, ‘and see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, children who are unfaithful. They made me jealous by what is no god and angered me with their worthless idols. I will make them envious by those who are not a people; I will make them angry by a nation that has no understanding. For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to the realm of death below. It will devour the earth and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains.’ ”¹

12. A summons to the destroyer 5:10-19

10 *“Go through her vineyards and ravage them, but do not destroy them completely. Strip off her branches, for these people do not belong to the LORD.*

11 *The house of Israel and the house of Judah have been utterly unfaithful to me,” declares the LORD.*

12 *They have lied about the LORD; they said, “He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.*

13 *The prophets are but wind and the word is not in them; so let what they say be done to them.”*

14 *Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: “Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.*

15 *O house of Israel,” declares the LORD, “I am bringing a distant nation against you — an ancient and enduring nation, a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand.*

16 *Their quivers are like an open grave; all of them are mighty warriors.*

17 *They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters; they will devour your flocks and herds, devour your vines and fig trees. With the sword they will destroy the fortified cities in which you trust.*

18 *“Yet even in those days,” declares the LORD, “I will not destroy you completely.*

19 *And when the people ask, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all this to us?’ you will tell them, ‘As you have forsaken me and served foreign gods in your own land, so now you will serve foreigners in a land not your own.’*

1. Deut. 32:15-22

There is some linguistic problem in v.10 that has divided the opinions of Bible scholars. *The Interlinear Hebrew Bible* reads literally: “Go upon her walls and destroy; but make not a full end: take away her battlements, for they are not the LORD’s.” The word translated “walls” is *sharah*, probably meaning “a fortification.” Since this verse is the only place in the Old Testament where the word is used, there is no basis for comparison. *The New King James Version* renders this verse: “Go up on her walls and destroy, but do not make a complete end. Take away her branches, for they are not the LORD’s.” *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “It is possible that not the city walls, but those of a vineyard are meant. Judaea is God’s vineyard (Isa 5:1-7), and God permits the enemy to enter the vineyard to destroy her.” To interpret the verse as the destruction of a vineyard would give it a highly symbolic meaning. The nation of Israel was symbolized by its vines and olive trees. Jesus compares the fellowship we as New Testament believers have with Him to a vine with branches.¹ The stripping off of the branches represents then the broken fellowship with God. That this is not a complete destruction, that the vine will be allowed to recover and bear again, speaks of the return from Babylonian captivity.

The Hebrew text of v.11 states that Israel and Judah have dealt treacherously with God. They have broken their promises which were part of the covenant of God and they have told lies about Him (v.12). The lie reads: “He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.” This presumes a denial of God’s righteousness, omniscience and omnipotence. The Psalmist expresses the same frustration, describing corruption among the judges of Israel. “O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve. How long will the wicked, O LORD, how long will the wicked be jubilant? They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting. They crush your people, O LORD; they oppress your inheritance. They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless. They say, ‘The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob pays no heed.’ ”² Our theology will always govern our moral behavior.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states here: “The deluded condition of the nation is depicted graphically here. The people, forgetful that God maintains His rights (Ex. 20:5), had stressed the privileges of covenant membership at the expense of its responsibilities, thinking that punishment was incompatible with the nature of a loving God. Consequently they had scoffed at predictions of calamity (*cf.* Zp. 1:12), regarding the prophets as mere windbags whose word had no higher authority than their own, and adhering instead to the soothing utterances of fast prognosticators. The delusion of the nation is thus complete, since they are not able to distinguish God’s true servants from the prophets of Baal.”

God considers the people of Judah to be like dry wood that will catch fire as soon as the Word of God is directed to them in all its power. That fire is not the Holy Ghost fire some people pray for; it is the fire that consumes the chaff, hay and stubble. Issuing a warning against idolatry, Moses said to the Israelites: “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”³ The author of Hebrew picks up this theme, saying: “God is a consuming fire.”⁴ When Jesus was led away to be crucified and some woman bewailed the spectacle, He must have remembered Jeremiah’s words here when He said: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”⁵

1. See John 15:1-8.

2. Ps. 94:1-7

3. Deut. 4:24

4. Heb. 12:29

5. Luke 23:28-31

In v.14 God addresses Jeremiah again, giving him His Word and showing him the effect that Word will have upon the people. The Word of God has been depicted in several images to demonstrate the effect it has on the human soul. The author of *Hebrews* compares it to a sword, rather a scalpel: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”¹ It represents judgment for the purpose of repentance and salvation. God Himself reveals the power of His word, saying: “Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”²

Jeremiah experienced the fiery power of God’s creative Word when he tried to ignore his prophetic calling, saying: “But if I say, ‘I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,’ his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.”³

As long as God’s Word is used as a tool of judgment it is meant for the salvation of the soul. When the soul does not respond to the challenge of the Word, spiritual death is the result and the Word of God becomes a crematory. Toward the end of Revelation, John sees Jesus Christ appear as the judge of the world. We read: “Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”⁴ The execution described there is a spiritual one. The Word of God slays the souls of those who refuse to be renewed by its creative power. It is in that sense that God infuses His Word in Jeremiah in the hope that the people’s conversion and repentance will keep captivity away from them.

The words in v.15 are an almost literal quotation from Moses’ speech in Deuteronomy. Moses foretold what would happen if Israel ceased to obey and serve the Lord. “The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the LORD your God is giving you.”⁵

The Hebrew text of v.15 reads: “ ‘Lo, I will bring upon you a nation from afar, o house of Israel,’ says the LORD: ‘it [is] a mighty nation, it [is] an ancient nation, it [is] a nation whose language you know not neither understand what they say.’” Although the nation is not identified here, history shows that the Babylonians are meant. It was the nation of which Abraham had been a part when the Lord called him to leave for Canaan. This means that the Hebrew spoken in Israel must have been closely related to the Babylonian language. Yet, God says here: “a people whose language you do not know, whose speech you do not understand.” *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “So Isaiah of the Assyrians, ‘(a people) of a stammering tongue, that thou canst not understand.’ The Jews were no philologists, and were as unlikely to notice the fundamental affinity of Hebrew and Assyrian as an ancient Greek to observe the connection between his own language and the Persian. When the combatants were to each other ‘barbarians,’ mercy could hardly be expected.”

Some Judeans must, however, have known Babylonian as some knew Assyrian during the reign of Hezekiah. For when King Sennacherib attacked Judah and sent representatives to Jerusalem to harass the

1. Heb. 4:12,13
2. Jer. 23:29
3. Jer. 20:9
4. Rev. 19:15,21
5. Deut. 28:49-52

population, some of Hezekiah’s officials said: “Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, since we understand it. Don’t speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people on the wall.”¹ But that does not mean that Babylonian could be understood by most of the people in Judah.

The fact that “their quivers are like an open grave” means that the Babylonian soldiers were sharpshooters whose arrows would kill all they hit.

The New International Version uses the verb “devour” four times in v.17. The Hebrew word ‘*akal*, simply means: “to eat,” but in the context “eat” acquires a voracious character. Babylon is seen as a monster that gobbles up land, people and cities.

Vv.18 and 19 reveal some of God’s emotional pain in meting out this kind of punishment to the people He loves. Judah will not be destroyed in the same way as the northern kingdom was wiped off the map. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states here: “The promise of 4:27 is repeated here, indicating that however threatening the denunciations against Judah, there is the reservation that destruction will not be complete (cf. Je. 3:14). The outcome of the covenant relationship provides the explanation of the promised calamity. Judah had chosen an alien god, and so would find herself in bondage to foreign deities in a strange land, an obvious prediction of the Babylonian captivity. The lesson taught here is that spiritual values can never be compromised with impunity. The Christian is warned constantly to avoid every appearance of evil (cf. Rom 12:2; 13:14; I Cor. 5:11, etc.)”

13. Reasons for the coming catastrophe 5:20-31

20. “Announce this to the house of Jacob and proclaim it in Judah:

21 Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear:

22 Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.

23 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts; they have turned aside and gone away.

24 They do not say to themselves, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives autumn and spring rains in season, who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.’

25 Your wrongdoings have kept these away; your sins have deprived you of good.

26 “Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men.

27 Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful

28 and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor.

29 Should I not punish them for this?” declares the LORD. “Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?

30 “A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land:

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

Their lack of spiritual insight prevented the people from experiencing the presence of the Lord. The theme of having eyes that do not see and ears that do not hear runs through Scripture like a scarlet thread. Moses first mentioned it in connection with the people’s failure to correctly interpret the exodus and the desert crossing. In his farewell speech, he said: “Your eyes have seen all that the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials and to all his land. With your own eyes you saw those great trials, those miraculous signs and great wonders. But to this day the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or

1. II Kings 18:26

eyes that see or ears that hear. During the forty years that I led you through the desert, your clothes did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet. You ate no bread and drank no wine or other fermented drink. I did this so that you might know that I am the LORD your God.”¹

God tells Isaiah to pick up the theme, saying: “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”² Whereas Moses said: “the LORD has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear,” Isaiah seems to state that preaching about judgment will have a dulling effect upon people’s heart and mind. A closer look, however, reveals that God will give a spirit of understanding to those who surrender to Him. Spiritual blindness and deafness are the natural condition of the person who has not repented and asked for forgiveness and salvation. But Isaiah infers that turning to God would mean being healed. It is the refusal to turn to God that perpetuates the state of original dullness of spirit.

For Jesus this was the reason He resorted to the use of parables. We read in Matthew’s Gospel that, after the Pharisees refused to accept Jesus’ miracles as proof of His being the Messiah, accusing Him of using demonic power to drive out demons, that Jesus began to hide His message by wrapping it inside simple stories. In His explanation to the disciples, He said: “In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”³

If the people had had an eye and an ear for spiritual realities, they would have recognized the presence of the Lord. The temple still stood and the Ark of the Covenant with the cover upon which the Shekinah rested was still present. Yet, the people lived as if God were not in their midst. In order to wake them up, God leads them to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea and shows them the miracle of the sand that keeps the waves back. The suggestion is that it would have been easy for some mighty breakers to wash away the land. The tsunamis of recent history prove that this is no idle threat. We may take this symbolically and see that God had kept Assur and other world powers away from Judah by protecting them with His mighty hand. God seems to say here that the sea and sand obey His command, so why do His people not live by His rule? R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, remarks: “There is no necessary correlation between sight and perception, hearing and comprehension. Indeed, the people are shown to be as stupid as the nonentities which they worship (*cf.* Pss. 115:5ff.; 135:15ff.). While God’s world has been fashioned so as to obey His will unswervingly, His covenant people have exploited their liberty brazenly to repudiate His commandments and indulge in all sorts of corruption, overstepping constantly the limits prescribed by the covenant relationship.”

The climate of Canaan differed from that in Egypt, where agriculture depended upon the flooding of the Nile. Canaan knew rainy seasons and dry seasons. Moses described these conditions and explained that God would faithfully maintain the seasonal changes for the benefit of the people if they remained faithful to Him. We read: “So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today — to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul — then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD’s anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and

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1. Deut. 29:2-6
 2. Isa. 6:10
 3. Matt. 13:14,15

you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.”¹ *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* states about the rainfall in Palestine: “Toward the end of October heavy rains begin to fall, at intervals, for a day or several days at a time. These are what the Bible calls the early or former rain (Heb. yoreh) literally the pourer. It opens the agricultural year. The soil, hardened and cracked by the long summer, is loosened, and the farmer begins plowing. Till the end of November the average rainfall is not large, but it increases through December, January, and February, begins to abate in March, and is practically over by the middle of April. The latter rains (Heb. malqosh) of Scripture are the heavy showers of March and April. Coming as they do before the harvest and the long summer drought, they are of far more importance to the country than all the rains of the winter months, and that is why these are passed over in Scripture, and emphasis is laid alone on the early and the latter rains. This has given most people to believe that there are only two intervals of rain in the Syrian year, at the vernal and autumnal equinox; but the whole of the winter is the rainy season.”

God used times of drought to get the people’s attention as is evident in the story of Elijah and the dramatic confrontation between God and Baal on Mount Carmel.² In Jeremiah’s days there were obviously upsets in the climate also, as is clear from vv.24 and 25. If, in these verses, the change in climate is linked to the people’s idolatry, in the following sections, vv.26-29, it is tied to social injustice. *Barnes’ Notes* suggests, however, that the famine was caused by human mishandling, not by God withholding the rain. We read: “It was not that the rains did not fall, or that the harvest weeks were less bright; the good was there, but the wickedness of the community blocked up the channels, through which it should have reached the people. The lawlessness and injustice of the times kept the mass of the people in poverty.”

Judah had turned into a capitalistic society in which competition and greed had made some people very rich at the cost of others. Instead of being a civilization in which neighborly love regulated inter-human relationship, some had turned into “fowlers,” people who were out to catch their neighbor and profit from his ruin. Amos had earlier prophesied against the people in the northern kingdom who “sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals [and] trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.”³

It is difficult to determine from the tone of the text whether the rains had come and grain had been harvested, but the economy had suffered from mishandling, making some very rich and others destitute. It is obvious, however, that there were some members of society who were ruthless and crooked businessmen taking advantage of defenseless ones. Some of that kind of corruption had penetrated the judicial system, as is obvious from the phrase: “They do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor.” Those practices were still going on in Jesus’ day. Jesus accused the teachers of the law, saying: “They devour widows’ houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely.”⁴ The human tendency to take advantage of disasters is as old as the human race; when earthquakes hit, or other calamities strike, the masses divert to looting stores.

The whole ruling class of the nation, judges, prophets and priests are accused of being corrupt. God had chosen Israel to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, a vehicle of His revelation on earth for the salvation of mankind. They had turned into a dunghill of moral decomposition. The ground rule of their existence: to love God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength and to love their neighbor as themselves⁵ had been substituted by idol worship and anti social behavior. Where the love of God ceases to be, neighborly love perishes also.

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1. Deut. 11:13-17
 2. See I Kings 18.
 3. Amos 2:6,7
 4. Mark 12:40
 5. Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18

Jeremiah describes the condition of the land with two Hebrew words *shammah* and *sha`aruwrah*, “A horrible and shocking thing.” The judicial system is corrupt, prophets have turned themselves over to the enemy and only prophesy lies and the priests have severed the band with God’s revelation and taken authority in their own hands. All this has happened with the full approval of the general public. They would not have had it any other way. From a theocracy Israel had turned into a democracy, the rule of the people, by the people, for the people and God was left out of the picture. But God stands at the end of the road of history and what do you do then?

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “When legal and religious values are perverted, there can be absolutely no stability in society. Verse 31 sums up the sin of the nation, showing that prophet and priest have been guilty of unthinkable faithlessness which in turn has been welcomed by the masses. So alien is this to the covenant ethos that the nation will have to endure punishment, a theme which, by its very familiarity, ought to have impressed itself deeply upon the Judean mind before now. False teachings remove the restraints of divine law and encourage human self-interest and the love of pleasure. This was characteristic of Judah’s last days, and is promised also for the end of the Christian era (cf. 2 Tim. 3:1-7, etc.).”

14. Jeremiah sounds the alarm 6:1-8

6:1 *“Flee for safety, people of Benjamin! Flee from Jerusalem! Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! For disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction.*

2 *I will destroy the Daughter of Zion, so beautiful and delicate.*

3 *Shepherds with their flocks will come against her; they will pitch their tents around her, each tending his own portion.”*

4 *“Prepare for battle against her! Arise, let us attack at noon! But, alas, the daylight is fading, and the shadows of evening grow long.*

5 *So arise, let us attack at night and destroy her fortresses!”*

6 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Cut down the trees and build siege ramps against Jerusalem. This city must be punished; it is filled with oppression.*

7 *As a well pours out its water, so she pours out her wickedness. Violence and destruction resound in her; her sickness and wounds are ever before me.*

8 *Take warning, O Jerusalem, or I will turn away from you and make your land desolate so no one can live in it.”*

The Hebrew of v.1 reads literally “Gather yourselves to flee...” Jeremiah would later issue the same warning to the captives, saying: “Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians.”¹ There is more involved in this warning and flight from an approaching enemy. There is a sense of fleeing from the pollution of sin in which city and society are steeped. Thus the angel urged Lot to flee Sodom, saying: “Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”² The Apostle Paul picks up the theme, giving it a clear spiritual connotation: “What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,’ says the Lord Almighty.”³

1. Jer. 50:8

2. Gen. 19:17

3. II Cor. 6:16-18

The warning is specifically issued to the tribe of Benjamin, the first reason being that Jeremiah was a member of that tribe. But also, the temple area belonged, properly speaking to that tribe, as it was in the territory allotted to them by Joshua.¹ According to some Jewish writers, the altars and the sanctuary were in Benjamin territory and the temple courts in Judah. But *The Pulpit Commentary* dismisses this as an “unnatural method of early harmonists.”

There is in Hebrew a play-on-words in the line “Sound the trumpet in Tekoa!” *Teqowa`* and *taqa`*, “to blow” sounds like an alliteration. *Barnes’ Notes* remarks: “The name of Tekoa is almost identical with the verb ‘to blow’: but it was not chosen merely for the alliteration, but because it was the last town in Judaea (about 11 miles south of Jerusalem), upon the very border of the desert, where the fugitives would halt.” The signal over Beth Hakkerem was probably a fire lit on the hills warning the people of an approaching enemy. Beth Hakkerem was about halfway between Jerusalem and Tekoa. The vision of the enemy coming from the north is the same as the one given to Jeremiah in the first chapter. “The word of the LORD came to me again: ‘What do you see?’ ‘I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north,’ I answered. The LORD said to me, ‘From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land.’”²

The Pulpit Commentary observes about v.2, “I will destroy the Daughter of Zion, so beautiful and delicate”: “This passage is one of the most difficult in the book, and if there is corruption of the text anywhere, it is here. The most generally adopted rendering is, ‘The comely and delicate one will I destroy, even the daughter of Zion,’ giving the verb the same sense as in ... Hosea 4:5 (literally it is, *I have brought to silence*, or perfect of prophetic certitude). The context, however, seems to favor the rendering ‘pasturage’ (including the idea of a nomad settlement), instead of ‘comely;’ but how to make this fit in with the remainder of the existing text is far from clear. The true and original reading probably only survives in fragments.”

The question is, who is speaking in v.2? This could be the voice of God, or of the Babylonian king. In a way the two voices may be blending together here. *The New Living Translation’s* rendering is worth considering: “O Jerusalem, you are my beautiful and delicate daughter — but I will destroy you! Enemy shepherds will surround you. They will set up camp around the city and divide your pastures for their flocks. They shout, ‘Prepare for battle and attack at noon! But now the day is fading, and the evening shadows are falling. So let us attack by night and destroy her palaces!’ ” God has turned His face against Jerusalem for her punishment, using the Babylonians to achieve His purpose. Since this whole chapter consists of five sections, four of which are introduced by the heading: “This is what the LORD (Almighty) says.”³ It is therefore logical to assume that the voice of the LORD is speaking here also.

The Hebrew text of v.4 uses the verb *qadash*, rendered here “prepare.” The word has a deeper meaning than merely “prepare.” It has a connotation of sanctifying, as in the verse: “And God blessed the seventh day and *made it holy*, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”⁴ The suggestion is that there was a religious ritual performed before the actual battle started. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains about the manner of ancient warfare: “In the ancient Near East all warfare was sacred. Staff astrologers attached to pagan armies consulted oracles regularly and offered ritual sacrifices before a decision to commence battle was announced. Such practitioners of the art of divination were in considerable demand in antiquity. Battles usually began in a morning when everyone had made proper preparations, and continued without interruption until nightfall, when the combatants retired until the next day. An attack under cover of darkness was therefore an unusual event. ... The usual techniques for attacking a fortification were to be employed for overthrowing Jerusalem. What the Babylonians did in the

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1. See Josh. 18:16,17.
 2. Jer. 1:13,14
 3. Jer. 6:9, 16, 21,22
 4. Gen. 2:3

sixth century BC was repeated by the Romans in AD 70.” We could say that the punishment of Judah and Jerusalem was related to the fact that God is holy.

In the section of vv.6-8, the Lord seems to address, first of all, the Babylonian army, then the public in general and finally Jerusalem. The intent is to bring the inhabitants of the city to repentance by showing them that the consequences of their sin would be the destruction of their city. Cutting down trees in the forest surrounding a city seems to have been a normal procedure during a siege. The Mosaic Law stipulated: “When you lay siege to a city for a long time, fighting against it to capture it, do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. Do not cut them down. Are the trees of the field people, that you should besiege them? However, you may cut down trees that you know are not fruit trees and use them to build siege works until the city at war with you falls.”¹

Jerusalem’s sin is compared to a well that spills over outside the city walls. The image evokes images of an earlier siege of the city in which the water supply was changed in order to keep it from the approaching enemy. We read: “When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come and that he intended to make war on Jerusalem, he consulted with his officials and military staff about blocking off the water from the springs outside the city, and they helped him. A large force of men assembled, and they blocked all the springs and the stream that flowed through the land. ‘Why should the kings of Assyria come and find plenty of water?’ they said.”² Here, the Lord says that it is the pollution of the spiritual city water that will draw the enemy to its gates.

There is a note of deep compassion in the words “Her sickness and wounds are ever before me.” Jerusalem’s wounds are self-inflicted. She could be healed by turning to her great physician, but she has no inclination to do so. We are reminded of God’s Word to Isaiah: “Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”³

This section ends with the final warning that God would leave Jerusalem and leave the people prey to the enemy. The Hebrew text of v.8 reads literally: “Be instructed, O Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from you, lest I make you desolate, a land not inhabited.” The Hebrew word translated “instructed” is *yacar*, which has the meaning of “to chastise,” in the sense of applying corporal punishment. We find it in the verse: “If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.”⁴ What God is saying here is that His presence, the Shekinah would leave the temple and the city, leaving it like a dead body, ready to decompose. Ezekiel saw in a vision how the glory of the Lord left the temple and finally the city, before Nebuchadnezzar was allowed to ransack it.⁵

15. The consequences of corruption 6:9-15

9 *This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Let them glean the remnant of Israel as thoroughly as a vine; pass your hand over the branches again, like one gathering grapes.”*

10 *To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the LORD is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.*

11 *But I am full of the wrath of the LORD, and I cannot hold it in. “Pour it out on the children in the street and on the young men gathered together; both husband and wife will be caught in it, and the old, those weighed down with years.*

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1. Deut. 20:19,20
 2. II Chron. 32:2-4
 3. Isa. 6:10
 4. Lev. 26:18
 5. See Ezek. 9-11.

12 *Their houses will be turned over to others, together with their fields and their wives, when I stretch out my hand against those who live in the land,” declares the LORD.*

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

14 *They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.*

15 *Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,” says the LORD.*

The destruction of Jerusalem is compared to the gathering of a harvest of grapes. The way this is presented is against the Mosaic Law, which said: “Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.”¹ God breaks here His own law to indicate that His law has no longer any meaning for those to whom it was given. The wrath of God is often presented as a harvesting of grapes that are trampled in a winepress. John saw this in Revelation: “Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”²

The prophetic Word falls on deaf ears, on ears that in Hebrew are called “uncircumcised ears.” This is the only place in Scripture where this expression is used in connection with the human ear. The term “uncircumcised” is applied to lips, as in the case of Moses, who said to the LORD: “If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with *faltering* lips?”³ It is said of the heart that it can be “uncircumcised,” as in: “But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers — their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies — then when their *uncircumcised* hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.”⁴ Since circumcision was the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham, to be uncircumcised means to be outside God’s covenant, which is demonstrated in a lack of obedience (the uncircumcised ear), failure to speak what God wants us to say (uncircumcised lips) and a lack of surrender to the will of God (uncircumcised heart). The last part of v.10 reads in Hebrew: “Behold, the word of the LORD is a reproach unto them; they have no delight in it.” The Hebrew word used for “reproach” is *cherpah*, which means “something to be ashamed of.”

Evidently, Jeremiah identifies with God’s reaction to the hardness of heart of the population of Jerusalem to the point where he finds himself full of the wrath of the Lord. He shares God’s indignation over Judah’s sin. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this experience, particularly on the words “Pour it out” in v.11: “If we retain the imperative, we must explain it with reference to Jeremiah’s inner experience. There are, we must remember, two selves in the prophet (comp. ...Isaiah 21:6), and the higher prophetic self here addresses the lower or human self, and calls upon it no longer to withhold the divinely communicated burden.”

Jeremiah’s identification with God’s wrath does not mean that he becomes literally the tool of Judah’s destruction; the carrying out of the verdict was left to Nebuchadnezzar and his army. We read in

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1. Lev. 19:10
 2. Rev. 14:18-20
 3. Ex. 6:12
 4. Lev. 26:40-42

Revelation the effect the prayers of the saints has upon conditions on earth: “Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” Jeremiah’s involvement in prayer would open the door to the destruction.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: “Because all of society has been corrupted by iniquity, the wrath of God is to be poured out upon everyone. Ancient Near Eastern war was essentially total in nature, so that a city which resisted a siege unsuccessfully could only expect complete destruction, without respect to property, age or sex. The content of verses 12 to 15 is recapitulated in 8:10-12 (*cf.* also Dt. 28:20). The stern message of destruction is aimed at the five stages of life mentioned here: the children in carefree play (*cf.* Zc. 8:5); the adolescents in their clubs or groups (*cf.* 15:17); the married adults; the more senior citizens; and finally those advanced in age. The Judeans will be deprived of all the material things which they have cherished. Property will be transferred violently to new owners, and all the old relationships of life will be changed when Jerusalem collapses before the enemy onslaught. This is the price to be paid for trust in materialism rather than in the living God. The wages of sin have indeed become death (Rom. 6:23), for the people have no hope, being without God in the world (*cf.* Eph. 2:12).”

The judgment, although affecting the whole population, is addressed particularly at the priests and the prophets, whose ministry could have protected the people and prevented disaster. Priests and prophets are supposed to be on God’s side and warn against the consequences of sin. But they sided with the people, leading them in deception and corruption. Their eye was on the benefits of the office, not upon the function. They treated those who were terminally ill as if they were merely suffering from a cold. Their slogan was “Peace, peace,” “*shalom, shalom.*”

The “loathsome conduct” of which the priests and prophets are being accused may be homosexual acts. The Hebrew word *tow`ebah* is used for something that is morally disgusting, either in idolatry or in sexual relations. The same word is used in *Leviticus* in the verse: “Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is *detestable.*”¹ The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah had caught up with Jerusalem.

16. More unheeded warnings 6:16-21

16 *This is what the LORD says: “Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’*
17 *I appointed watchmen over you and said, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’ But you said, ‘We will not listen.’*

18 *Therefore hear, O nations; observe, O witnesses, what will happen to them.*

19 *Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law.*

20 *What do I care about incense from Sheba or sweet calamus from a distant land? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable; your sacrifices do not please me.”*

21 *Therefore this is what the LORD says: “I will put obstacles before this people. Fathers and sons alike will stumble over them; neighbors and friends will perish.”*

God places Jeremiah at the intersection of Israel’s history; there is a crossing of paths; it is the place where people meet. Jesus used this picture frequently in His preaching. He compared life to our traveling on a road, either the broad road that leads to destruction, or the narrow road that leads to life.² He also offered

1. Lev. 18:22

2. See Matt. 7:13,14.

rest to the soul in His invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”¹

The invitation to look “for the ancient paths” actually means to remember history. For Israel to forget that they came from slavery in Egypt and were set free by a series of supernatural divine interventions, that they survived the desert crossing and were brought into the Promised Land meant that they did not understand the reason for their existence.

Where there is no understanding of the past and no focus of the future there can be no guidelines for moral daily living either. Only those who say with Asaph: “Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever”² know how to live morally correct lives.

Throughout the ages people have believed that “ancient paths” are obsolete, that traveling on them would hinder progress. In some cases such a critical attitude may be valid. The parody of a famous hymn states: “Like a mighty tortoise moves the church of God. Brethren we are treading where we’ve always trod!” It takes spiritual insight to distinguish between one ancient path and another. True spiritual liberation does not always mean a change of road. Peter says that Jesus sets the example: “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”³

As in English, the Hebrew word *derek* for “road,” or “path” has a figurative meaning also in the sense of “a course of life or mode of action.” In that sense the text may mean: “See what you have done.” So is the word used in Haggai, when the people lost their zeal for the rebuilding of the temple after returning from captivity. We read: “Now this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways.’”⁴ *Young’s Literal Translation* reads there: “And now, thus said Jehovah of Hosts, Set your heart to your ways.”

The trumpet in v.16 is the same as the one sounded in the first verse of this chapter: “Flee for safety, people of Benjamin! Flee from Jerusalem! Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! For disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction.” Here it is the prophetic word, warning the people of the judgment God will send upon their sinful lifestyle.

In vv.17 and 18 Judah is held up as an example to the whole earth. All the nations of the world will witness what God would do to those who had been appointed to be a kingdom of priests, but who refused to function as such.

During the priesthood of Eli, whose sons desecrated the sanctuary with their sinful behavior, God said to young Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.” Jeremiah would later pick up this expression and use it in connection with Jerusalem’s destruction by Nebuchadnezzar.⁵ To the rest of the world, deities were local spiritual powers whose authority was limited to their national borders. Israel, however, proclaimed to serve the God who is the Lord of heaven and earth. For a people who make the claim of possessing a temple where their God resides and who consider themselves to be the center of the earth, to be dispossessed and ruined, would be inconceivable to the rest of the world. Yet, this is what happens here. God gives up the only representation He has on earth, because the people refused to be what He wanted them to be. They meticulously continued to observe the outward appearances by bringing the prescribed sacrifices, particularly those that symbolize worship, such

1. Matt. 11:28-30
2. Ps. 73:23-26
3. I Peter 2:21
4. Hag. 1:5,7
5. See I Sam. 3:11; Jer. 19:3.

as burnt offerings and sacrifices of incense. But since their rituals were not backed up by personal holiness, they had become meaningless.

Although the text of v.18 makes sense in *The New International Version*, the Hebrew text is actually less clear. It reads literally: “Therefore, hear, you nations, and know, o congregation, what [is] among them.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The passage is obscure. ‘Congregation’ can only refer to the foreign nations mentioned in the first clause; for Israel could not be called upon to hear the judgment ‘upon this people’ (ver. 19). There is, however, no other passage in which the word has this reference. The words rendered ‘what is among them,’ or ‘what (shall happen) in them,’ seem unnaturally laconic, and not as weighty as one would expect after the solemn introduction. If correct, they must of course refer to the Israelites.”

God says here the same to Judah as Samuel said to King Saul who had disobeyed the Lord: “Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”¹ Disobedience means withdrawing from God’s protection. Jude writes: “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”² But here God makes people stumble who refuse to obey Him. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the “obstacles”: “Stumbling blocks - instruments of the Jews’ ruin (cf. Matt 21:44, “Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken;” Isa 8:14, ‘A stone of stumbling, and ... a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel;’ 1 Peter 2:8). God Himself in judicial displeasure (‘I’) lays stumbling blocks before the reprobate, ‘even as they have not liked to retain God in their knowledge’ (Ps 69:22; Rom 1:28; 11:9). So His righteous sentence on the Jews, who turned their very spiritual privileges into means of spiritual pride, ending in their rejection of Messiah, was, ‘Let their table (the rich spiritual board provided for them) be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block unto them.’ ” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, adds to this: “The obstacles confronting the people are of their own making, and when retributions comes they cannot blame God (cf. James 1:13–15).”

17. The character of the invader 6:22-26

22 *This is what the LORD says: “Look, an army is coming from the land of the north; a great nation is being stirred up from the ends of the earth.*

23 *They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on their horses; they come like men in battle formation to attack you, O Daughter of Zion.”*

24 *We have heard reports about them, and our hands hang limp. Anguish has gripped us, pain like that of a woman in labor.*

25 *Do not go out to the fields or walk on the roads, for the enemy has a sword, and there is terror on every side.*

26 *O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us.*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this section: “The prophet here portrays in vigorous poetic language a description of the invaders from the north. They are cruel, merciless horsemen, who will usher in Judah’s death-throes. In language reminiscent of Habakkuk, Jeremiah again warns of the imminence of invasion by an anonymous northern military power (cf. 1:13–15). National

1. I Sam. 15:22

2. Jude v.24,25

apathy towards sin is challenged by a vigorous description of the cruel and relentless foe, armed with bow and saber (NEB). The one objective of this ruthless army is the destruction of the nation. Tidings of the approaching enemy send ripples of panic through the population. The coming conflict will be as unequal as that between a fully-equipped soldier and a defenseless woman demoralized by shock. The plight of women in a conquered land was desperate, and it is no accident that Jeremiah uses the familiar phrase ‘daughter-Zion’ to add further poignancy to the Judean crisis. In an urgent appeal to confront future realities, Jeremiah paints a graphic picture of the dangers about to engulf the people. Enemy armor would spell terror all around, another of Jeremiah’s watchwords (*cf.* 20:3,10), hence fugitives should avoid the countryside and the open road. Prior to a later destruction of Jerusalem its people were counseled to flee to the mountains (Mk. 13:14; Lk. 21:21). Because of her sin, the only posture which Judah can adopt is to *roll in ashes* (RSV) or *sprinkle* herself with ashes (NEB, following LXX). Death is always calamitous for Jews, and when the only son of a family dies the implied cessation of ‘immortality’ for the parents is especially catastrophic (*cf.* Am. 8:10; Zc. 12:10).”

The “bitter wailing as for an only son,” is a theme picked up by Zechariah, who puts it in the context of Jesus’ death on the cross. We read: “And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son.”¹ John, in Revelation refers this to the second coming of Christ, saying: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”²

It may be far-fetched to read this thought into Jeremiah’s prophecy of the coming Babylonian invasion. But we must bear in mind that there is an element of grace in all announcements of judgment over sin. Punishment can be avoided by repentance. The Babylonians would never have reached Jerusalem any more than the Assyrians were prevented from doing so in earlier history, had Judah given heed to Jeremiah’s advice to “roll in ashes.” But it remains ultimately true that even in our pre-repentant state Jesus took upon Himself the punishment for our sins.

Even today, Israel has not come to that recognition, but, according to John’s prophecy, those who pierced Him will mourn, that is they will confess with tears, when they see Him coming with the clouds.

Although Jesus took upon Himself the ultimate punishment for the sins of the world, without repentance, the world will not be saved. V.26 expresses as much of God’s anguish as Jeremiah’s who was charged with passing on the message of judgment. Jesus gave vent to this agony of soul as He was being led away to be crucified and some women wept. He turned to them and said: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then ‘they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’” For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”³

It is difficult, if not impossible for us to imagine or understand the conflict between God’s wrath and God’s love. We suppose that an almighty God would find a way to save a sinner without the requirement of repentance. Since we don’t understand what holiness is and the importance of its perfection be preserved, and since we don’t appreciate enough that God created us in His image, which implies that we have the right to choose, we tend to belittle our sinful condition and the role we must play in order to be saved from our sin. Most of us rather keep our sin, in spite of the fact that it will take us into a lost eternity, than to turn to God and thoroughly repent. Only the Holy Spirit can give true repentance by making us understand the severity of our condition. As Jesus says: “When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt

1. Zech. 12:10
2. Rev. 1:7
3. Luke 23:28-31

in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.”¹ We believe that rolling in ashes makes us despicable. The Dutch theologian Abraham Kuiper has said: “The garment of contrition does not disgrace a person.” As David said: “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”²

18. The final assay 6:27-30

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

The New International Version reads v.27: “I have made you a tester of metals and my people the ore, that you may observe and test their ways.” The Hebrew of the text has given cause to much discussion among Bible scholars. It reads literally: “For a tower I have set you among my people [and] a fortress that you may try their way.” The Hebrew word *mibtsar*, “fortress” is the problem. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, some scholars have tried to change the pointing of the word, giving it a different meaning. But no fully satisfactory method has been found that explains the word that appears to be out of context. *The Commentary* concludes that a copier must have inserted the word “fortress” by mistake. There may be a reference to the words used when God called Jeremiah to his prophetic ministry and said: “Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land.”³

The image of testing metal for the purpose of purification is common in Scripture. The Apostle Peter writes: “In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”⁴ Job says: “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.”⁵ The Psalmist writes: “For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver.”⁶ And in Proverbs we read: “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.”⁷ In Isaiah, God says to the people: “See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”⁸ In all of these instances a positive result is achieved or assumed. In this case, however, the process only produces dross. Corruption has run its complete course. Judah’s condition resembled the state of the pre-flood population, of which we read: “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every

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1. John 16:8-11
 2. Ps. 51:17
 3. Jer. 1:18
 4. I Peter 1:6,7
 5. Job 23:10
 6. Ps. 66:10
 7. Prov. 17:3
 8. Isa 48:10

inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”¹ Since purification turned out to be ineffective, rejection in captivity was the only option left.

19. The temple address 7:1-8:3

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

2 "Stand at the gate of the LORD's house and there proclaim this message: 'Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD.

3 This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place.

4 Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!"

5 If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly,

6 if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm,

7 then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever.

8 But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.

9 "Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known,

10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe" — safe to do all these detestable things?

11 Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

12 "Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel.

13 While you were doing all these things, declares the LORD, I spoke to you again and again, but you did not listen; I called you, but you did not answer.

14 Therefore, what I did to Shiloh I will now do to the house that bears my Name, the temple you trust in, the place I gave to you and your fathers.

15 I will thrust you from my presence, just as I did all your brothers, the people of Ephraim.'

16 "So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.

17 Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?

18 The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.

19 But am I the one they are provoking? declares the LORD. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?

20 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: My anger and my wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.

21 "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!

22 For when I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not just give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices,

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

1. Gen. 6:5

24 But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubborn inclinations of their evil hearts. They went backward and not forward.

25 From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets.

26 But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.’

27 “When you tell them all this, they will not listen to you; when you call to them, they will not answer.

28 Therefore say to them, ‘This is the nation that has not obeyed the LORD its God or responded to correction. Truth has perished; it has vanished from their lips.

29 Cut off your hair and throw it away; take up a lament on the barren heights, for the LORD has rejected and abandoned this generation that is under his wrath.

30 “‘The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it.

31 They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire — something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.

32 So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.

33 Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

34 I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.

8:1 “‘At that time, declares the LORD, the bones of the kings and officials of Judah, the bones of the priests and prophets, and the bones of the people of Jerusalem will be removed from their graves.

2 They will be exposed to the sun and the moon and all the stars of the heavens, which they have loved and served and which they have followed and consulted and worshiped. They will not be gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.

3 Wherever I banish them, all the survivors of this evil nation will prefer death to life, declares the LORD Almighty.’

The text of this chapter consists of what God told Jeremiah to proclaim at one of the gates of the temple. Vv.1-15 give the actual words to be spoken. In vv.16-19 God addresses Jeremiah personally. These are not words that are meant to be passed on to the general public. Vv.21-26 give another part of the sermon to be preached. And in 7:27-8:3 God speaks again to Jeremiah only.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, states about the first 20 verses: “This word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord (1) appears to have been delivered shortly after Jehoiakim’s accession, *i.e.*, about 608 BC, when pagan Canaanite rituals were appearing again in the cultic rites of Judah. It is difficult to question the genuineness of the pronouncements, or, for that matter, the furor which they created. This latter is described in 26:7–24, which comprises the historical summary of the affair. To the Judeans the Temple was sacrosanct, being the house of the living God and therefore impregnable to all attack. Because of this belief it was ironic that this building was the very place where such erroneous ideas were exposed and denounced. For this purpose Jeremiah stationed himself at one of the gates of the Temple courts where he would be guaranteed a large audience. According to Kimchi there were seven gates in all. His message was simple and direct: *Mend your ways and you doings* (3, NEB) if you still want to live in the land. LXX has a shorter summons than that in MT, reading: *Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah* (2). Jeremiah’s words reflect Deuteronomy 7:12–15 and the fact that the promises given there only belong to a nation which keeps God’s commandments faithfully.”

Barnes’ Notes explains: “With the accession of Jehoiakim all hope of averting the ruin of the country had passed away. He represented the reverse of his father’s policy, and belonged to that faction, who

placed their sole hope of deliverance in a close alliance with Pharaoh-Necho. As this party rejected the distinctive principles of the theocracy, and the king was personally an irreligious man, the maintenance of the worship of Yahweh was no longer an object of the public care. At this time upon a public fast day, appointed probably because of the calamities under which the nation was laboring, Jeremiah was commanded by Yahweh to stand at the gate of the temple, and address the people as they entered words of solemn warning. The whole sermon divides itself into three parts: (1) It points out the folly of the superstitious confidence placed by the people in the temple, while they neglect the sole sure foundation of a nation's hope. A sanctuary long polluted by immorality must inevitably be destroyed (Jer 7:2-8:3). (2) Complaints follow of a more general character, in which the growing wickedness of the nation and especially of the leaders is pointed out (Jer 8:4-9:24). (3) Lastly the prophet shows the possibility of averting the evils impending upon the nation (Jer 9:25-10:25)."

The Bible does not provide many details about the evil Jehoiakim did. We only read: "He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God." His name was originally Eliakim, but Pharaoh Neco changed his name to Jehoiakim.¹ No explanation for this is given. Ironically, both names appear to refer to resurrection by God. Jehoiakim's reign, however, spelled the death of the nation.

The Hebrew text of v.3 reads literally: "Amend your ways and your doings." The Hebrew word, translated "amend" is *yatab*, which means "to make well," or "to make beautiful." We find it first used in the words God spoke to Cain: "If you *do what is right*, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."² It is also found in: "Sing to him a new song; play *skillfully*, and shout for joy."³ The Apostle Paul defines sin as falling short of the glory of God.⁴ God is glorious and our sin makes us ugly. If we repent of our sins, God will share His glory with us.

For Israel, living in the land expressed symbolically a life in fellowship with God. It was called "entering in God's rest." Though this was put negatively in the Old Testament, where we read: "So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest,'"⁵ it is obvious that the intent is positive, as the author of Hebrew puts it: "There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."⁶

Judah, as Israel before, considered that holding on to the outward rituals was sufficient guarantee to remain in the Promised Land. "The temple of the LORD" was used as a protective slogan. With sharp irony Jeremiah repeats the phrase three times, probably imitating the way people used the words as a mantra. V.8 reads literally in Hebrew: "Behold, you trust in lying words that cannot profit." It was, of course, true that the building referred to was the temple of the LORD. But their reference to the building did not constitute a recognition of God's presence among them. Instead of honoring God by living a life that was in accordance with His holiness, they used Him as a cover for their sin. The people knew God's requirements, as Micah says: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."⁷ But instead they practiced a reign of terror, committing murder and idolatry, all in the Name of God.

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1. II Chron. 36:4
 2. Gen. 4:7
 3. Ps. 33:3
 4. See Rom. 3:23.
 5. Ps. 95:11
 6. Heb. 4:9-11
 7. Mic. 6:8

In Jesus' days the people's attitude had not changed in principle. Jesus accused the Pharisees of finding loopholes in the obligation to honor the Lord and His temple. We read: "Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it."¹

Vv.12 and 14 mention the destruction of Shiloh. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "The Bible does not mention the fall of Shiloh. Jeremiah's inference that it was destroyed (Jer 7:12,14; 26:6,9) has been confirmed by the recent excavation of the site, which indicated that the city was destroyed by the Philistines about 1050 BC, probably after the battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam 4)."

It is difficult to understand that people can live in the presence of God and be completely blind to that reality. The fact that Judas could be one of the inner circle of disciples of Jesus and yet steal, is one of the mysteries of the human soul. When Jacob fled from Esau and spent the night at Bethel, we read: "When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.' He was afraid and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.'"²

The Pulpit Commentary observes here: "Jeremiah attacks this false confidence in the temple of Jerusalem, by pointing to the destruction of an earlier sanctuary, of which very little is known, indeed only so much as to give an edge to our desire for more. It is certain, from ... Joshua 18:1 and ... 1 Samuel 4:3, that the tabernacle and the ark found a resting-place at Shiloh (an Ephraimitish town to the north of Bethel), nearly the whole of the period of the judges, or more exactly between the latter days of Joshua (... Joshua 18:1) and the death of Eli (... 1 Samuel 4:3). Manifestly, then, there must have been some sort of 'house,' *i.e.* temple, at Shiloh; a mere tent would not have been sufficient for so long a period. This presumption is confirmed by the language of Jeremiah, and by the expressions of the narrative books. The fate which the prophet is bidden to announce for the existing temple is analogous to that which fell upon 'Jehovah's place in Shiloh.' The latter was, therefore, not merely a deportation of the ark, such as is referred to in 1 Samuel 5. And when the narrator of the times of Samuel speaks of Eli as 'sitting by the door-post of the temple of Jehovah' (... 1 Samuel 1:9), is it more natural to suppose that the word 'temple' is here applied to the tabernacle, or that there was really a house, however rude, as sacred in the eyes of the faithful as was afterwards the splendid temple at Jerusalem? The latter view is strongly confirmed by ... Judges 18:31, 'All the time that the house of God in Shiloh existed' (Authorized Version is misleading), and ... Judges 19:18, where the Levite traveling to Mount Ephraim says, 'I am going to the house of Jehovah.' It is no doubt strange at first sight that so little information is given us as to this central sanctuary of the true religion; but are there not other omissions (especially in the history of the judges), which are equally strange as long as we look upon the Old Testament as primarily an historical document? We do know something, however, and more than is generally suspected; for when the right translation is restored in ... Judges 18:31, it follows, from a comparison of this and the preceding verse, that the temple of Shiloh was destroyed simultaneously with the captivity of the northern tribes. The impression produced by this emphatic announcement of Jeremiah is revealed to us by a later passage in his book (see Jeremiah 26)."

V.15 reads literally in Hebrew: "I will cast you out of My sight, even as I have cast out all your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim." The Hebrew word for "cast out" is *shalak*, which means: "to throw away." "Ephraim" stands for the whole northern kingdom. It is difficult to imagine that these words

1. Matt. 23:16-22

2. Gen. 28:16,17

would fail to leave an impression upon the people of Judah. The Assyrian captivity, which took place approximately 100 years earlier at 721 BC, must still have been vivid in the mind of the people of Judah. Samaria, which used to be part of the united kingdom and which was now occupied by foreign migrants constituted a stunning reminder.

God’s command to Jeremiah to stop interceding for the nation strikes us as strange. Since proclamation of judgments was always an act of mercy, leaving an option to the people to repent, intercession for their repentance seems to have been the order of the day. We find a similar warning in Ezekiel, where God says: “Even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.”¹ Evidently, Jeremiah kept interceding for Judah, as *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “We have a specimen of his intercession in ... Jeremiah 14:19-22 (comp. ... Jeremiah 18:20), followed immediately by a rejection of his prayer, parallel in thought to the present passage.”

The people of Judah had evidently reached the point of no return where intercessory prayer would no longer prevail. Jeremiah must have had a hard time accepting this and kept on praying, because we read in a later chapter: “Then the Lord said to me: ‘Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!’”²

Like the Israelites, there is always a danger that we attach too much value to lifeless objects that are reminders of previous experiences. The fact that God had declared to be present above the cover of the ark did not make the ark into God. When we have a picture of someone we love, the picture does not become the person; it only reminds of us him or her. When Solomon prayed his prayer at the dedication of the temple he said: “But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built!”³ That profound statement ought to have given the people to understand that the building and the Person of God were not identical. When the people said: “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!” they acted as if God were in the stones or the gold of the temple. Present day Jews still believe this when praying at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. When we do not see God as the One that the highest heaven cannot contain, we will not find Him anywhere on earth either.

While recognizing the presence of God in the temple building, the people of Judah were giving their undivided attention to “the Queen of Heaven” to whom they performed rites of worship. Bible scholars have different opinions as to what this worship entailed. Some believe she was thought to be the wife of Baal or Moloch and that part of her worship was carried out in the form of temple prostitution. According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the title “Queen of Heaven” only occurs in Jeremiah.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about this deity: “This is no doubt a part of the astral worship which is found largely developed among the Jews in the later period of their history in Canaan. It is first mentioned in 2 Kings 17:16 as practiced by the men of the Northern Kingdom when Samaria had fallen and the ten tribes were being carried away into captivity. Moses is represented as warning the Israelites against the worship of the sun and moon and stars and all the host of heaven, practiced by the people of Canaan (Deut 4:19; 17:3) and the existence of such worship among the Canaanites and neighboring nations is attested from an early period (compare Job 31:26-28).” *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* adds: “Wife of Baal or Moloch, ‘king of heaven.’ The male and female pair symbolized nature’s generative powers, from whence prostitution was practiced in her worship.”

In the Ten Commandments God had promised His most severe punishment to those who committed this kind of idolatry, calling Himself “a jealous God.” We read: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not

1. Ezek. 14:14
2. Jer. 15:1
3. I Kings 8:27

bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”¹ Here God says to Jeremiah: “But am I the one they are provoking? ... Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?” This does not merely refer to the severity of their punishment but to the fact that they have withdrawn themselves from God’s protective blessing. Worship of God glorifies us in the process; idolatry leads to shame. It is bad for one’s health, both spiritually and physically.

Sin not only affects the person who sins. According to v.20, God’s wrath over the sins of Judah would leave the country a place of scorched earth. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “All creation in some mysterious way shares in man’s fall and restoration (Rom 8:19-22).”

The Pulpit Commentary observes further: “That all creation shares in the curse of man is repeatedly affirmed in the Old Testament as well as the New. Inferentially, this doctrine appears from the narrative of the Fall, and still more clearly from Isaiah’s description of Paradise regained (11.). Hosea speaks of sufferings of the animals arising out of the guilt of Israel (... Hosea 4:3), and a consciousness of the ‘solidarity’ of all living creatures is ascribed to a Ninevite king in the Book of Jonah (... Jonah 3:7, 8). In general, the origin of this community of suffering is left mysterious, but in ... Genesis 6:12 it is expressly stated as the cause of the Deluge, that ‘all flesh [*i.e.* both man and beast.] had corrupted its way upon the earth;’ *i.e.* apparently, that contact with man had led to a corruption of the original innocence of the lower animals. It is a common experience that intercourse between Christianized (not to say civilized) man and the domestic animals produces a sometimes pathetic change in the psychic phenomena of the latter. Is the reverse process utterly inconceivable?”

What God expects man to do is to obey Him out of love. “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”² When King Saul disobeyed God and tried to cover it up with some sacrifices, Samuel told him: “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”³ When God says here to the people: “Go ahead, add your burnt offerings to your other sacrifices and eat the meat yourselves!” He does not give them the OK to go ahead, but He emphasizes that sacrifices cannot not replace obedience. A lack of obedience annuls the meaning of the sacrifice. In Paul’s words: “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”⁴

The Hebrew text of v.25 uses the word *shakam*, which literally means: “to incline the shoulder to a burden.” The same word is found in v.13. *The New King James Version* translates it “rising up early in the morning,” which is the way it is used in connection with the angels in Sodom to whom Lot says: “My lords, please turn aside to your servant’s house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way *early in the morning*.”⁵ *The New Living Translation* renders it: “day in and day out.” Obviously, *early in the morning* does not make much sense in this context.

Ever since the exodus, Israel’s problem had been that when she left Egypt, she took Egypt with her in her heart. The birth of the nation was not accompanied by regeneration and spiritual renewal. The people received the law, but the law only revealed their sinful condition. It was not until the coming of Christ and the Holy Spirit that people would be born again. As the Apostle Paul says: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the

1. Ex. 20:4-6
2. John 14:15
3. I Sam. 15:23
4. I Cor. 13:3
5. Gen. 19:2

sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”¹ Even though there had been a constant stream of prophets in Israel’s history, Israel’s soul did not change.

One could ask what is the point of preaching if it is a forgone conclusion that the people will not listen. God told Jeremiah that such would be the case (v.27). Actually, the preaching would increase the people’s guilt. We can hardly overstate the effect this truth must have had upon Jeremiah. It must have crushed him emotionally to know that, not only would his obedience to God’s call increase the people’s guilt, but also that his ministry would be without any fruit at all. When Jesus saw that His preaching was without result, He thanked the Father, saying: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure.”² It was this lack of response that made Jesus turn to parables as a form of teaching, so that the truth of the Gospel would no longer be presented clearly but would be hidden in a story. When His disciples asked Him about this, He replied: “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. This is why I speak to them in parables: ‘Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.’”³ Someone has called Jesus’ method of hiding the truth “a conspiracy of mercy,” meaning that it would diminish people’s guilt, since truth became illusive. Such mercy is here being withheld, both from the prophet and the people.

Judah is given the epitaph: “This is the nation that has not obeyed the Lord its God or responded to correction” (v.28). In similar fashion Jesus would say about Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.”⁴ The Hebrew text of v.28 reads: “Truth is cut off from their mouths.” Those who cannot hear the truth are not able to speak it either. If the lie is all that is left in a person, that person has become a child of the father of lies. The Hebrew word rendered “truth” here is *‘emwnah*, which literally means: “firmness,” or “fidelity.” What a far cry Judah had come from the days of King David, who sat before the Lord and exclaimed: “And who is like your people Israel — the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt?”⁵

In v.29 we read: “Cut off your hair and throw it away.” The Hebrew text uses the word *nezer*, which has the primary meaning of “something set apart.” In connection with the consecration of the high priest it means “turban” as in the verse: “Put the *turban* on his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban.”⁶ Since *nezer* is related to the word Nazarite it has been thought reference could be to the fact that the Nazarite was not allowed to cut his hair. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The ‘daughter of Zion,’ *i.e.* the community of Jerusalem, is addressed; this appears from the verb being in the feminine. It is a choice expression which the prophet employs —literally, *shear off thy crown* (*i.e.* thy chief ornament). The act was to be a sign of mourning (see ... Job 1:20; ... Micah 1:16). Some think there is also a reference to the vow of the Nazarite (the word for ‘crown’ being here *nezer*, which is also the word rendered in Authorized Version,

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1. Rom. 8:1-4
 2. Matt. 11:25,26
 3. Matt. 13:11-13
 4. Matt. 23:37
 5. II Sam. 7:23
 6. Ex. 29:6

‘separation,’ *i.e.* ‘consecration,’ in the law of the Nazarite (Numbers 6.). But neither in this context nor anywhere else have we any support for the application of the term ‘Nazarite’ to the people of Israel.”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary adds: “In these verses the judgment of v. 20 is depicted in all its horror, and the description is introduced by a call upon Zion to mourn and lament for the evil awaiting Jerusalem and the whole land. It is not any particular woman that is addressed in v. 29, but the daughter of Zion (*cf.* Jer 6:23), *i.e.*, the capital city personified as a woman, as the mother of the whole people. Cut off nizek, thy diadem. There can be no doubt that we are by this to understand the hair of the woman; but the current opinion, that the word simply and directly means the hair, is without foundation. It means crown, originally the diadem of the high priest, Ex 29:6; and the transference of the same word to the hair of the head is explained by the practice of the Nazarites, to wear the hair uncut as a mark of consecration to the Lord, Num 6:5. The hair of the Nazarite is called in Num 6:7 the consecration (*neezer*) of his God upon his head, as was the anointing oil on the head of the high priest, Lev 21:12. In this sense the long hair of the daughter of Zion is called her diadem, to mark her out as a virgin consecrated to the Lord. Cutting off this hair is not only in token of mourning, as in Job 1:20; Mic 1:16, but in token of the loss of the consecrated character. The Nazarite, defiled by the sudden occurrence of death near to his person, was bound to cut off his long hair, because by this defilement his consecrated hair had been defiled; and just so must the daughter of Zion cut off her hair and cast it from her, because by her sins she had defiled herself, and must be held as unconsecrated.”

This is one of the few places in Scripture where the horror of idolatry, as it was practiced in Canaan, is referred to. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: “The placing of their hateful idols in the Temple (2 Ki. 21:5) was the supreme gesture of sacrilege. The valley of Topheth (31), south of Jerusalem, had witnessed pagan sacrificial rites in the time of Manasseh (2 Ki. 23:10). *Topheth* is probably from an Aramaic word *tpat*, fireplace, while Ben-hinnom was perhaps the name of the former owner of the valley. The burning of children was one of the principal rites of Molech worship as practiced by the Ammonites and others, and was strictly prohibited under the Mosaic Law (Lv. 18:21; 20:2–5). For their idolatry the Israelites themselves will be slaughtered by the invading enemy.”

Topheth means: “drum.” Drums were played during the pagan rites to drown out the cries of the children that were being sacrificed to Moloch. *The Easton’s Bible Dictionary* states about Topheth that it is: “the name of a particular part in the valley of Hinnom ... Tophet properly begins where the Vale of Hinnom bends round to the east, having the cliffs of Zion on the north, and the Hill of Evil Counsel on the south. It terminates at Beer ‘Ayub, where it joins the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The cliffs on the southern side especially abound in ancient tombs. Here the dead carcasses of beasts and every offal and abomination were cast, and left to be either devoured by that worm that never died or consumed by that fire that was never quenched. Thus Tophet came to represent the place of punishment.” The change of the name from Topheth to “slaughter” is not really a change; slaughter is what had gone on at this place already. The difference is that the victims would no longer be innocent children but evil perpetrators.

As long as Israel had served the Lord in Jerusalem, the city was joyful. The exuberant joy of David as the ark was brought in¹ was indicative for the joy of worship that had been. This joy is captured here particularly by “the voices of bride and bridegroom,” pictures of blooming love. With the disappearance of worship joy is taken away also. Jerusalem and the surrounding cities of Judah turn into cemeteries filled with unburied bodies. Not even are the dead not buried, but those already buried are exhumed and the bones are laid out to be exposed to the heavenly bodies that had been the object of their worship. The text does not elaborate how this would happen. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* says: “Still more appalling is the promise that the invaders will disinter the remains of the previously-buried inhabitants of Jerusalem. This barbarous act may have been intended as a deliberate insult to the community, or perhaps had as its aim the uncovering of valuables thought to be buried with the corpses. It could, however, be interpreted as incidental to the construction of a ramp prior to the final assault on the capital, though this suggestion is

1. See II Sam. 6:14,15.

rather improbable. The sense seems to be that of deliberately exposing the fallen devotees to the astral deities worshipped, which are thereby proved powerless to prevent the gross humiliation and indignity described. A final observation reminds the Judeans that the remains will be like so much manure on the ground. Even more miserable than the fate of those who perished would be the lot of the survivors.”

20. A disobedient and idolatrous people 8:4-9:1

4 "Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: "'When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return?

5 Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return.

6 I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle.

7 Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord.

8 "'How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord," when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?

9 The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what kind of wisdom do they have?

10 Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.

11 They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.

12 Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the Lord.

13 "'I will take away their harvest, declares the Lord. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them.' "

14 "Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there! For the Lord our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against him.

15 We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror.

16 The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. They have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there. "

17 "See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you," declares the Lord.

18 O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me.

19 Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?" "Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"

20 "The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."

21 Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me.

22 Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?

9:1 Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.

In vv. 4-13 God gives His assessment of the people of Judah. In vv.14-16 the people react in fear. In v.17 it is again the Lord who speaks and in 8:18-9:1 Jeremiah bursts out in an emotional cry.

The question in v.4 is rhetorical: “When men fall down, do they not get up? When a man turns away, does he not return?” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “One of those appeals to common sense in which the prophets delight. Who ever sees a fallen man stay quietly on the ground without attempting to rise? Or a man who has wandered out of the path persist in going in the wrong direction?”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* introduces this section with: “The prophet detects in the arrogant, willful apostasy of his people something quite contrary to nature. He concludes that they are deliberately stifling the instinct to obey divine ordinances in favor of indulging in the immoral rituals of Canaanite religion. Jeremiah is disgusted by the variety and multiplicity of Judah’s sins, and laments her coming fate.” On vv.4-7, the commentary states: “This poetic section dealing with the tragedy of a complacent nation hurtling headlong to destruction begins with a play on the word *šûb*, *turn ... return*. Whereas normal people eventually learn from mistakes, the Judeans will never profit from experience because they are obstinate and willful. However, there is still time for them to be saved if only they will repent. But the tragedy is that, while birds follow faithfully the instinctive urges of migration, the Israelites steadfastly refuse to yield to the promptings of covenant love. The *ordinance* is anything decreed by God, whether the instinct of migratory birds or the directions given for human guidance. Jeremiah finds it incredible that a people can behave so unnaturally towards its Creator.”

The fact that man is created in the image of God is both his glory and his punishment. When sin entered the human race, man’s nature became sinful but the image of God in him, though damaged, did not disappear. It is the fact that both sinful nature and divine origin remain in us side by side that causes the conflict. That is what made the Apostle Paul cry out: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”¹

It is part of man’s natural instinct to want to get up when he falls. We have been created to stand erect on two legs, not to crawl on the ground. What is true in the natural, ought to be true spiritually also, but it is not. God compares human nature with animal behavior, using two illustrations: a warhorse and birds. Of the birds, the stork, dove, swift and thrush are mentioned in *The New International Version*. As far as I know, only the stork is migratory. *The King James Version* mentions “the turtle and the crane and the swallow,” and *The New King James Version* “the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow.” Isaiah had used similar language, using different animals as illustration. We read: “The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.”²

In v.8 the people boast about their wisdom, which is based on the fact that they had received the Law of Moses. In this they were correct, at least in principle, though not in practice. Moses had said: “See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”³ But the law, instead of being their guide for daily living, had become a fetish, in the same way as some people nowadays will put a Bible under their pillow to protect them from evil.

1. Rom. 7:15-25
2. Isa. 1:3
3. Deut. 4:5,6

The Pulpit Commentary comments here: “The word *torah*, commonly rendered ‘Law,’ is ambiguous, and a difference of opinion as to the meaning of this verse is inevitable. Some think these self-styled ‘wise’ men reject Jeremiah’s counsels on the ground that they already have the divinely given Law in a written form (comp. ... Romans 2:17-20), and that the Divine revelation is complete. Others that *torah* here, as often elsewhere in the prophets (e.g. ... Isaiah 1:10; 8:16; 42:4), simply means ‘instruction,’ or ‘direction,’ and describes the authoritative counsel given orally by the priests (... Deuteronomy 17:11) and prophets to those who consulted them on points of ritual and practice respectively. The usage of Jeremiah himself favors the latter view (see ... Jeremiah 2:8; 18:18; and especially 26:4, 5, where ‘to walk in my *Torah*’ is parallel to ‘to hearken to the words of my servants the prophets.’ The context equally points in this direction. The most natural interpretation, then, is this: The opponents of Jeremiah bade him keep his exhortations to himself, seeing that they themselves were wise and the divinely appointed teachers of the people. To this Jeremiah replies, not (as the Authorized Version renders) **Lo, certainly in vain made he it**, etc.; but, *Yea, behold I for a lie hath it wrought — the lying pen of the scribes* (so Authorized Version, margin). *Soferim* (scribes) is the term proper to all those who practiced the art of writing (*sefer*); it included, therefore, presumably at least, most, if not all, of the priests and prophets of whom Jeremiah speaks. There are indications enough that the Hebrew literature was not entirely confined to those whom we look up to as the inspired writers, and it is perfectly credible that the formalist priests and false prophets should have availed themselves of the pen as a means of giving greater currency to their teaching. Jeremiah warns his hearers to distrust a literature which is in the set-vice of false religious principles — a warning which prophets in the wider sense of the term (‘The Liberty of Prophecyings’) still have but too much occasion to repeat, it is right, however, to mention another grammatically possible rendering, which is adopted by those who suppose *torah* in the preceding clause to mean the Mosaic Law: ‘Yea, behold, the lying pen of the scribes hath made (it) into a lie;’ *i.e.* the professional interpreters of the Scriptures called scribes have, by their groundless comments and inferences, made the Scriptures (especially the noblest part, the Law) into a lie, so that it has ceased to represent the Divine will and teaching. The objections to this are: (1) the necessity of supplying an object to the verb — the object would hardly have been omitted where its emission renders the meaning of the clause so doubtful; (2) that this view attributes to the word *soferim* a meaning which only became prevalent in the time of Ezra (comp. ... Ezra 7:6, 11).”

The human tendency is to believe that, since God created man with the ability of logical thinking, that all human thinking is on the same level as divine wisdom. Nineteenth century “enlightened thinkers” called human reason “the divine candle.” From that assumption human logic took the next step up and considered itself to be above God’s wisdom. Modern man believes himself to be able to evaluate God and His wisdom. To this, the Apostle Paul’s reply still stands: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”¹

In v.8 the people may say “the law of the Lord is with us,” but according to v.9, “they have rejected the Word of the Lord.” What is the point of having the Law of the Lord if the Word of the Lord is not being heard? It amounts to the same vanity as the repeated slogan in the previous chapter: “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!”²

Vv.10-12 are a repeat of 6:12-15. They are omitted in *The Septuagint*. The punishment announced in these verses suggests the crimes committed. While proclaiming to possess the law, the people broke the law by committing adultery and robbery. God will repay them by having other men take their wives and possessions. Everything the people do is prompted by materialism. God considers the people of Judah to be

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1. I Cor. 1:20-22,25
 2. Jer. 7:4

suffering from fatal injuries, but they are unaware of the fact. The catchphrase is “peace,” but the nation is dying. Cancer is treated with a band-aid.

There is symbolism in the description of the failing harvest of grapes and figs in v.13. Since Judah does not produce any fruits of righteousness, God takes away that which symbolizes relationship with Him. The last line of the verse, “What I have given them will be taken from them” presents some problems of interpretation. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests a different punctuation of words, which would give the reading: “And I will give them to those who shall pass over them,” stating: “The phrase to pass away is constantly used of an invading host; e.g. Isaiah 8:7; Daniel 11:10, 40.”

The Hebrew text of v.14 reads literally: “Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the Lord our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink because we have sinned against the Lord.” The Hebrew word for “gall” is *ro’sh*, which may refer to a poisonous plant or poison in general. Jeremiah uses the expression several times.¹ David used the word in one of his psalms where it becomes a prophecy of the crucifixion: “They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.”²

In these verses the people are speaking to themselves or to one another. They seem to be blaming the Lord for what is happening to them. Even though they say: “because we have sinned against him,” these words do not necessarily constitute a confession; they may well mean that the people see this as the Lord’s excuse for treating them the way He does. The question is what makes them say these things. There must have been some event that caused them to make plans for evacuation. There may have been fighting in the northern part of the country, too close for comfort. Or, as *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: “The prophet transports us by a stroke of his pen into the midst of the fulfillment of his prophecy. The people of the country districts are represented as urging each other to flight. True, it is the resource of despair.” Either “the snorting of the enemy’s horses” could be heard already, or Jeremiah projects these images prophetically on the screen to make the people realize what the coming judgment will look like so they will be scared into genuine confession and repentance. Repentance must be accompanied by a realization that the message of peace by the false prophets was indeed a lie.

In v.17 we hear again the Word of the Lord. Moses had issued the same warning against the apostasy of the people, saying: “I will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them. I will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague; I will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust.”³ The passage reminds us of the time when Israel murmured against the Lord in the desert and “the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died.” At that time Moses made an image of a snake in bronze and put it on a pole for all to see. “Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.”⁴ Jesus told Nicodemus that this incident was representative of His crucifixion. We read: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”⁵ Whenever the Lord sends vipers, the image of the bronze serpent always stands in the background. There is healing for those who call upon the Lord who was lifted up to take away the sin of the world. Ironically, the bronze snake of Moses became a fetish in later days till King Hezekiah demolished it.⁶

1. See Jer. 9:15; 23:15.

2. Ps. 69:21

3. Deut. 32:23,24

4. See Num. 21:6-9.

5. John 3:14,15

6. II Kings 18:4

There is a textual problem in v.18 as far as the correct reading is concerned. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The text is here extremely difficult, and if there is corruption anywhere it is in the opening of this verse.” *The Interlinear Hebrew Bible* reads: “When I would comfort myself against sorrow. My heart is faint in me.” The problem word is the Hebrew word *mabliyyiyth*, which only occurs here in the whole Old Testament. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* suggests: “Oh that I had, that there were for me comfort!” stating: “The sense suits, but the ellipse is without parallel. It is simpler to take the words as an exclamation: the special force of it, that he knows not when to seek comfort, may be gathered from the context. ... The grief which cuts so deeply into his heart that he sighs for relief, is caused by his already hearing in spirit the mourning cry of his people as they go away into captivity.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes about 8:18 – 9:1: “These verses show the intense agony through which Jeremiah passed as he contemplated the ruin of his people. His outpoured grief issued from the conflict between his love for the homeland and his unswerving fidelity to the commands of God. The meaningless *mabliyyiyth*, the first word of verse 18, seems to belong to the end of verse 17, and some manuscripts divide it into two words *mibb^ellî g^ehôt*, *beyond recovery*. The snakebite is thus fatal. Verse 18 as amended would then begin, *Grief has overtaken me*. The captivity is here anticipated as the deportees question the reason for the degradation of Jerusalem. There will be no harvest to offset the promised famine, and no prophets or righteous men to heal the national malaise. Gilead was famous from the patriarchal period for its balsamic resin (Gn. 37:25), but the precise kind of balm mentions here is uncertain. There has been no regeneration of Judah’s health because her spirit is still unregenerate.”

Evidently, the prophet sees his people already in captivity and without any evidence that the Lord is with them in their imprisonment. They are removed from Zion, the place of God’s revelation, which means that God no longer reveals Himself to them. Reading, however, the prophecies of those who personally experienced the captivity, Ezekiel and Daniel, we see that God revealed more of His glory to them than He ever did to the pre-captivity prophets, Jeremiah included. Although Daniel prayed through his window open in the direction of Jerusalem,¹ the Lord demonstrated to him that He was in Babylon also.

The dialogue between the people and the Lord in v.19 must also have occurred in Jeremiah’s head. This is put here on paper for the benefit of the people to make them turn away from their idolatry and thus prevent captivity.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v. 20: “**The harvest is past**, etc. For ‘summer,’ read *fruit-gathering* (the vintage began in September). The people again becomes the speaker. The form of the speech reminds one of a proverb. When the harvest was over and the fruit-gathering ended, the husbandmen looked for a quiet time of refreshment. Judah had had its ‘harvest-time’ and then its ‘fruit-gathering;’ its needs had been gradually, increasing, and, on the analogy of previous deliverances (comp. ... Isaiah 18:4; 33:10), it might have been expected that God would have interposed, his help being only delayed in order to be the more signally supernatural. **But we are not saved** (or rather, *delivered*).”

V.1 of chapter 9 can be seen as either spoken by Jeremiah or by the Lord Himself. The grief over Judah’s spiritual condition is so intense that there are not enough tears to weep over it.

21. Judah’s corruption and ruin 9:2-26

2 Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, so that I might leave my people and go away from them; for they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people.

3 "They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me," declares the Lord.

4 "Beware of your friends; do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver, and every friend a slanderer.

1. Dan. 6:10

5 Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning.

6 You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me," declares the Lord.

7 Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty says: "See, I will refine and test them, for what else can I do because of the sin of my people?"

8 Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbor, but in his heart he sets a trap for him.

9 Should I not punish them for this?" declares the Lord. "Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?"

10 I will weep and wail for the mountains and take up a lament concerning the desert pastures. They are desolate and untraveled, and the lowing of cattle is not heard. The birds of the air have fled and the animals are gone.

11 "I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals; and I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there."

12 What man is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it? Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross?

13 The Lord said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law.

14 Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them."

15 Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water.

16 I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them."

17 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come; send for the most skillful of them.

18 Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams from our eyelids.

19 The sound of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins.'"

20 Now, O women, hear the word of the Lord; open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail; teach one another a lament.

21 Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares.

22 Say, "This is what the Lord declares: "'The dead bodies of men will lie like refuse on the open field, like cut grain behind the reaper, with no one to gather them.'"

23 This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches,

24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord.

25 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will punish all who are circumcised only in the flesh —

26 Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab and all who live in the desert in distant places. For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart."

We could read these verses as if it is God speaking. The Lord then goes back over the centuries and, speaking as a human being, reminiscing over Israel's desert crossing, He regrets that He ever brought the people into the Promised Land. In similar fashion as in the days of Noah, God is sorry that He did not leave Israel in the desert. We read in Genesis: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had

become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth — men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air — for I am grieved that I have made them.’ ”¹

Another, more logical, interpretation is to put these words in the mouth of Jeremiah. Some Bible scholars see a parallel with David’s exclamation in one of his Psalms: “I said, ‘Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest — I would flee far away and stay in the desert.’ ”² It seems preferable to look at this exclamation as part of Jeremiah’s inner conflict that began in v.18 of the previous chapter.

God says that the people of Judah use lies as a weapon. The Hebrew text reads literally: “They bend their tongues like their bows for lies but not for the truth: they are valiant upon the earth for from evil to evil they proceed; and me they know not saith the Lord.” The text is rather difficult to render correctly. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, suggests: “Like a bow they bend their tongue; falsehood is their bow. They have prevailed in the land, but not in the interests of truth. They go from one evil to another . . .” There is a reference to the conquest of Canaan in this reproach. The very fact that God gave them the Promised Land and that they had to conquer or drive out the inhabitants, whose measure of iniquity was full to the brim, ought to have made them the symbol of truth and integrity. Instead they became the embodiment of the evil they had set out to eradicate.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “There is a sad, stern irony in these words, which remind us of Isaiah’s (. . . Isaiah 5:22) ‘valiant men — for drinking wine’ and of our own prophet’s repetition of himself in (. . .Jeremiah 22:10, ‘Their valor is — untruth.’ A less pointed form of the same figurative statement is that of the psalmist in . . . Psalm 64:3.” The imbedded references read: “Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine and champions at mixing drinks.”³ And: “They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows.”⁴

The most trustworthy relationships between humans turned into pitfalls. No one could be trusted anymore, whether friend or brother. The Hebrew text has a play-on-words on the name Jacob. The Hebrew word for “deceive” is *aqab* “to seize by the heel,” from which the name Jacob is derived. We find the verb in the verse: “Esau said, ‘Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!’ ”⁵

There is definitely a positive note in God’s announcement that He intends to refine His people. The melting pot in which the metal is purified is not for the purpose of destroying it, but in order to purify it. Jeremiah had earlier used the image of the crucible in which the metal was melted to refine it. We read: “The bellows blow fiercely to burn away the lead with fire, but the refining goes on in vain; the wicked are not purged out.”⁶ But that statement did not refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. The Hebrew text uses the words *tsaraph* “to refine” and *bachan*, “to test.” Isaiah uses the first word in: “I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities.”⁷ And Zechariah uses the second verb in: “This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and

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1. Gen. 6:5-7
 2. Ps. 55:6,7
 3. Isa. 5:22
 4. Ps. 64:3
 5. Gen. 27:36
 6. Jer. 6:29
 7. Isa. 1:25

they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”¹ All this is an illustration of Paul’s statement: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”²

Judah would not experience these events of judgment as positive; they would see them as disasters meant to annihilate them. The destruction of the temple and the city meant the death of God’s revelation on earth. But for God death is the gate to resurrection. The only reason Christ died was to conquer death from the inside out. Death belongs to Satan and there is a satanic element in the fire that melts the metal. But the process of purifications will ultimately turn against the devil and become his undoing. When Jesus said to Peter: “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat,”³ Satan’s intent was not to purify the wheat but to produce chaff. But God allowed Peter to be shaken up in order to end up with a clean kernel of wheat. The way God speaks in vv.7-9 sounds like a death sentence, but the punishment is meant to be chastisement, discipline for the purpose of healing.

It is difficult to determine who speaks in v.10. The words fit well into Jeremiah’s earlier lamentations. But we can also see in them an expression of God’s compassion. The heart of a prophet must be in tune with God and so we may say that Jeremiah’s expresses here some of God’s own emotions. So we read about Jesus: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”⁴

The Pulpit Commentary states: “This and the next six verses contain a description of the sad fate of the sinful land and people. At first the prophet speaks as if he saw it all spread out before him. Then, in the character of a surprised spectator, he inquires how this came to pass, and receives the Divine answer, that it is the doom of self-willed rebellion.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments here: “The calamity of an apostate nation hurtling headlong to destruction stirs up powerful emotions in Jeremiah. He describes the destruction of Judah graphically, picturing the ravaged pastures of the wilderness on which cattle normally grazed (*cf.* Ex. 3:1), and the flight of birds and beasts (*cf.* Je. 4:25). Soon only jackals will inhabit the ruins (*cf.* 10:22; 49:33; 51:37). The scene is reminiscent of Christ lamenting the fate of Jerusalem in a later age (Mt. 24:1–28; Mk. 13:1–23; Lk. 21:5–24), with the spiritual causes of destruction remaining constant.”

The picture is of nature after man has been removed from it. The creation and presence of man lends completeness to God’s creation, without him a vital part of God’s glory is missing. Man’s fall in sin took away a vital element in the beauty of it all. In the words of the Apostle Paul: “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”⁵ It is this groaning creation that is the topic of Jeremiah’s lament.

The purpose for which the prophet paints the picture of the scorched land is for the people to hear the voice of God that warns them to avoid this punishment by turning from their idolatry, but no one is sufficiently tuned in to hear God speaking. C. S. Lewis says: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” But Judah is not hurting enough yet to hear God shout at this point. Very few people, when disaster strikes, will ask what God is saying to them.

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1. Zech. 13:9
 2. Rom. 8:28
 3. Luke 22:31
 4. Matt 9:36
 5. Rom. 8:18-22

Vv.13-16 spell out the indictment and punishment. The people of Judah broke the first of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”¹

The punishment is detailed in v.14, which reads in Hebrew: “Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel; behold I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.” The Hebrew word, rendered “wormwood” is *la`anah*, which literally means: “to curse,” or “to be accursed.” There may be a reference to the way of capital punishment that would put Socrates to death by making him drink poison. That way of meting out capital punishment may have been known in Jeremiah’s time. Moses warned the people against the kind of sin that would make them incur God’s wrath, using the same image: “You yourselves know how we lived in Egypt and how we passed through the countries on the way here. You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.”²

Jeremiah repeats the same words in a later chapter in which particularly the prophets are condemned: “Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty says concerning the prophets: ‘I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land.’”³ The author of *Hebrews* picks up the theme, saying: “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.”⁴ Fellowship with God will create a society of people who love one another. Straying away from that vital relationship will create an atmosphere of bitterness and dry rot that affects all of society.

Barnes’ Notes observes about v.16: “This verse is taken from Lev 26:33. The fulfillment of what had been so long before appointed as the penalty for the violation of Yahweh’s covenant is one of the most remarkable proofs that prophecy was something more than human foresight.” The passage in Leviticus reads: “I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.” The latter part of this verse can hardly refer to the Babylonian captivity, since those who were taken to Babylon were the remnant of which a portion returned. It cannot be applied either to the Diaspora, which occurred at 70 AD, since there still exists a very large number of Jews scattered among the nations. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Even in the land of their captivity they shall have no rest. A special prophecy to the same effect was addressed to the Jewish fugitives in Egypt (... Jeremiah 44:27). In both cases it is the unbelievers who are referred to; the nation as such was, through its divine calling, indestructible.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about vv.17-22: “Jeremiah strikes a sensitive chord in depicting death as a grim reaper. In a lament over the destruction of Jerusalem he heightens the imagery of desolation by calling for the professional *mourning women* (17) to make loud wailing. These persons generally followed the bier at a funeral and loudly lamented the passing of the deceased (*cf.* Mt. 9:23). Now they will have to learn the real meaning of personal grief, for death has come to claim his victims in Judah without respect to age or sex. The allusion might be to a fatal epidemic resulting from siege

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1. Ex. 20:3-6
 2. Deut. 29:16-18
 3. Jer. 23:15
 4. Heb. 12:14,15

conditions, but this is at best uncertain in a poetic passage.” There is something particularly heartrending about making funeral arrangements while the person for whom they are made is still alive. Jeremiah announces to his contemporaries that they are about to die and that God is planning their funeral. This is done in the hope that the sick person will not die but turn to God in repentance and live.

Professional wailing strikes us as Westerners as something strange and artificial. We find it difficult to understand the eastern mind at this point. The practice probably comes from the animistic belief that the spirit of the deceased will find satisfaction in the intensity of sorrow and consequently will not remain to harm the survivors but enter into his rest.

The wailing called for here goes beyond that which is customary. Normally, people who call for wailers, pay for others to make the appropriate noises of grief. But in this case the wailing is so convincing that it will bring a cataract of tears, even to those who pay for the ritual. The first reason for the wailing is for the land and the city. Jerusalem is turned into a pile of rubble. It is no longer a place where God can reveal Himself and a habitat for humanity. The most poignant picture is in v.21: “Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares.” Death has come in as a thief, not through the door but through the window. As *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The ideal of Zechariah is that ‘the streets of the city should be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof’ (viii. 5). But the pitiless reaper, Death, shall cut off even ‘the playful child from the street’ (so we might render more literally). Streets, in the parallel clause, means the ‘broad places’ where men congregate to tell the news.”

Reading vv.23 and 24, we may get the impression that they do not fit in the context. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “These two verses were hardly composed for their present position, though a connection may, of course, be thought out for them. Perhaps a comparison of ... Habakkuk 3:17,18 may help us. There the prophet looks forward to a complete desolation resulting from the Chaldean invasion, and yet declares that he can even exult in his God. So here. All subjects of boasting have been proved untrustworthy; but one remains — not wisdom, not valor, not riches, but the knowledge of the revealed God.” But these verses are not Jeremiah’s personal reflection; they are the Word of the Lord. Although the context is about judgment and punishment, God wants it to be clear that He is kind, just and righteous and that He delights in people who understand that and practice those qualities themselves.

The Hebrew verb “boast” occurs four times in these two verses. The root meaning of *halal* is: “to shine.” It contains an element of glory. We find it used in the verse in which Sarah is introduced to Pharaoh: “And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they *praised* her to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace.”¹ David used it in his praise of God: “*Glory* in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.”² The Apostle Paul quotes this verse in connection with his own ministry: “Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man’s territory. But, ‘Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.’ ”³

It is in the context of God’s judgment that we find the words “let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me.” God invites us to understand what He is doing and the reason for His doing so. The Hebrew text uses the verbs *sakal* and *yada`* for “understand” and “know.” *Sakal* conveys the idea of knowledge that makes one circumspect and *yada`* stands for intimate knowledge. We find the first word in the negative context of the temptation of Eve: “When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for *gaining wisdom*, she took some and ate it. She

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1. Gen. 12:15
 2. I Chron. 16:10
 3. II Cor. 10:15-17

also gave some to her husband.”¹ It also has the meaning of knowledge that leads to success, as in the verse: “Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you *may prosper* in everything you do.”² *Yada`* is used in the verse: “Adam *lay with* his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.”³

It may be difficult to look at God’s judgment over Judah that resulted in the captivity and the destruction of Jerusalem and see it as an act of kindness. Justice and righteousness may be, but kindness? Is God kind when He allows people to die? It takes wisdom beyond that which is found in the human mind and intimate knowledge of God’s character to come to a positive conclusion about the above. God allowed Adam and Eve to die after they sinned and, in them, the whole human race to become subject to death. God’s kindness in this becomes evident if we consider the alternative. It would have been infinitely worse if God had decided to let man live eternally with the consequences of his wrong choices. Death marks not only the end of life on earth, it also means the end of sin. When we die, our sin dies with us. To keep on living with the excruciating pain of cancer would be much worse than to die of cancer. God’s kindness may be difficult to discern but it is there. If we build our life on the premise that God cannot be other than perfect, we must conclude that everything God does is the best that can be done in any circumstance. That conviction may help us to penetrate below the surface of what appears to be disastrous.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.25 and 26: “In an appended saying Jeremiah states that the Judeans, though circumcised in body, had no real inner dedication to the spiritual ideals of Sinai, having indulged in lust instead of glorifying God in body and spirit (cf. I Cor. 6:20). They were thus no better than their pagan neighbors, and so could only expect to be punished. The group of nations mentioned may possibly have comprised an anti-Babylonian alliance under Egyptian leadership.” *The New International Version* gives as alternate reading of the phrase “in distant places” “and who clip the hair by their foreheads” (v.26). On this Harrison remarks: “Trimming the hair away from the temples (cf. Je. 49:32) was forbidden in the Law (Lv. 19:27), and the reference here may be to certain Arab tribes who did this to honor Bacchus.”

The Hebrew of v.25 has the difficult construction *muwl*, “to circumcise,” and *`orlah*, “foreskin,” or “uncircumcised.” *The New International Version* renders this “all who are circumcised only in the flesh.” *The New King James Version* reads: “circumcised with the uncircumcised.” *The New Living Translation*: “circumcised in body but not in spirit.” *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests the reading “all the circumcised in uncircumcision, or, “all the uncircumcised-circumcised.” The Commentary proceeds to ask: “But what does this enigmatical expression signify?” Quoting some Bible scholars, it suggests that: “as applied to the Jews, it means circumcised in the flesh, but not in heart, and, as applied to the heathen, simply uncircumcised.” The Commentary continues: “The latter meaning, however, is surely very improbable, and it would only become necessary if it were proved that circumcision was practiced by none of the nations mentioned but the Jews. This is not the case. There is no doubt that the Egyptians were circumcised in very early times. ... The assertion that only the priests underwent the operation has no older evidence than that of Origen. ... As to the Ammonites and Moabites, we have, unfortunately, no information. With regard to the Edomites, it is true that, according to Josephus (‘Antiq.,’ 13:9, 1), they were compelled to accept circumcision by John Hyrcanus. But it is still quite possible that, at an earlier period, the rite was practiced, just as it was among the ancient Arabs, the evidence for which is beyond question.”

The Apostle Paul seems to answer the question quite clearly when he addresses the Jews in his *Epistle to the Romans*, stating: “Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. If those who are not circumcised keep the law’s requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and

1. Gen. 3:6
2. Deut. 29:9
3. Gen. 4:1

circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God."¹

22. The impotence of idols 10:1-16

1 Hear what the Lord says to you, O house of Israel.

2 This is what the Lord says: "Do not learn the ways of the nations or be terrified by signs in the sky, though the nations are terrified by them.

3 For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel.

4 They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.

5 Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good."

6 No one is like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power.

7 Who should not revere you, O King of the nations? This is your due. Among all the wise men of the nations and in all their kingdoms, there is no one like you.

8 They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols.

9 Hammered silver is brought from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. What the craftsman and goldsmith have made is then dressed in blue and purple — all made by skilled workers.

10 But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King. When he is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure his wrath.

11 "Tell them this: 'These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.'"

12 But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.

13 When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

14 Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them.

15 They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.

16 He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including Israel, the tribe of his inheritance — the Lord Almighty is his name.

There are some problems connected with this section as far as the authenticity is concerned. *The Pulpit Commentary* states rather bluntly: "Whoever wrote the prophecy in Vers. 1-16 of this chapter, it was not Jeremiah; but of course, as the passage forms part of a canonical book, its claims to the character of a Scripture remain the same as if it were the work of our prophet. It is obvious at the very outset that it interrupts the connection; Vers. 17-25 stand in no relation to Vers. 1-16, but attach themselves most naturally to the concluding verses of Jeremiah 9." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states more cautiously: "This poem comprises a scathing denunciation of idolatry from one who has seen its worst effects at first hand. The passage has been suggested as the work of Isaiah (*cf.* Is. 40:18-20; 41:7; 44:9-20; 46:5-7) because of the similarity of phraseology. The sense does not flow very smoothly, as in verses 6 to 9, while verse 11, written in Aramaic, may be a gloss. In LXX verses 6 to 8 and verse 10 are omitted completely, while verse 9 occurs after the first part of verse 5, in an obvious attempt to provide better continuity of thought. Perhaps Jeremiah was quoting aphorisms coined by Isaiah relating to idolatrous worship, but in any event the prophecy as a whole shows that Jeremiah had first-hand acquaintance with the

1. Rom. 2:25-29

depraved nature of Canaanite worship, and thus did not need to draw either on the experience or the vocabulary of his prophetic precursors. It therefore seems unlikely that anyone other than Jeremiah was the author of this section.”

The idolatry described in vv.1-5 seems to be focused on astrology, which was developed to a high degree of science among the Babylonians. Jeremiah mentions several times the fact that the people of Jerusalem worship the Queen of Heaven: “Do you not see what they are doing in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger.”¹ The suggestion is that there was a converging of heavenly bodies that was considered to spell disaster. The way to prevent the consequences of what happened with the constellations was put in the hands of idols. That is what the prophet ridicules in these verses.

In a fashion similar to Isaiah’s sarcastic treatment of the subject, Jeremiah proceeds to describe the process of idol fabrication and worship. The most devastating description is in v.5: “Like a scarecrow in a melon patch.” That rendering is more an interpretation than translation of the Hebrew, which reads: “They are upright like a palm tree.” Scarecrows may keep away birds from melon patches, but idol statues cannot influence the moving of celestial bodies. Jeremiah calls that concept “worthless.” The Hebrew word *hebel*, meaning “emptiness or vanity” is the same as the one used in Ecclesiastes: “ ‘Meaningless! Meaningless!’ says the Teacher. ‘Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.’ ”² The only one who can do anything about movements in the sky is “God [who] made the earth by his power; [who] founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding” (v.12).

The sarcasm of these verses is achieved by comparing man’s creation of idol statues that depend on man to move them around and the living God, Creator of man. In vv.6 and 7 Jeremiah compares God to man who creates idols and concludes that God is incomparable. In vv.8 and 9 the idols created by man are used in the comparison. God is not a local deity as the idols were supposed to be. He is “King of nations,” “the living God,” “the eternal King.” The reference to God’s wrath in v.10 is meant as a deterrent of idolatry.

V.8 reads in *The New International Version*: “They are all senseless and foolish; they are taught by worthless wooden idols.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “But they are altogether brutish; and a doctrine of the stock of vanities [is] vanities.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “Verse 8b is poorly transmitted, being rendered literally *an instruction of vanities is the tree itself*. The meaning is that the instruction received from idols is of no more value than the idol itself. Hence nothing of moral or spiritual consequence can be expected from such material sources.” And *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: “The clause ... furnishes a reason for the folly of the heathen; how should they attain to more than a ‘wooden’ knowledge, when the idols themselves are but wood? A bitter truth in an ironical form.”

The Genesis account of creation records that God created trees on the third day. We read: “Then God said, ‘Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.’ And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.”³ Trees are a marvel of God’s creation, but they are several ranks lower than man who was created on the sixth day. The person who worships and obeys God is compared to a tree, as in: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.”⁴ But when man makes an idol out of wood he fells the tree and kills it first. In that sense an idol statue is twice dead. Nothing of the marvel of God’s third-day creation is left in it.

1. See Jer. 7:17,18; 13:18; 29:2; 44:17-19,25.

2. Eccl. 1:2

3. Gen. 1:11,12

4. Ps. 1:3

As mentioned above, the problem of v.11 is that it is not written in Hebrew. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “This verse is, unlike the rest of the chapter, written in Chaldee, and greatly interrupts the connection. Whether it is a fragment of a Targum (or Chaldee paraphrase) representing a Hebrew verse really written by Jeremiah, or whether it is a marginal note by some scribe or reader which has found its way by accident into the text, cannot be positively determined. What is certain is that it is not in its right place, though it already stood here when the Septuagint Version of Jeremiah was made. To argue, with the ‘Speaker’s Commentary,’ that the latter circumstance is decisive of the correctness of the passage in its present position, implies a view of the unchangeableness of the text in the early centuries which few leading scholars will admit.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, adds: “Verse 11 is in Aramaic, and may comprise a popular anti-polytheistic saying. Some Jewish interpreters think that it may have been part of a letter sent to Jehoiachin in Babylon instructing him how to combat idolatry, but this is doubtful.” As it stands in our text, it forms a valid bridge to the following verses by comparing God, the Creator of the universe, with these pieces of wood, the dead remains of the living trees God created.

God’s creation unfolds in v.12 as a three-paneled painting, displaying His power, wisdom and understanding. Some Bible scholars see in this a reference to the Trinity being involved in creation. The Hebrew words are respectively: *koach*, *chokmah* and *tabuwn*. The words are very close to each other in meaning, but they highlight shades of difference. *Koach* speaks of vigorous strength as in the words addressed to Pharaoh who refused to let Israel go: “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my *power* and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”¹ *Chokmah* is the kind of wisdom that enables to produce beauty, as in the verse: “Tell all the *skilled* men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest.”² And *tabuwn* speaks of the practical application as in the gift God gave to Solomon: “God gave Solomon wisdom and very great *insight*, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.”³ None of those are present in a piece of dead wood.

V.13 presents another text-critical problem. *The Pulpit Commentary* states that it presents difficulties of interpretation and suggests that *The King James Version* probably comes closest to its original meaning. In *The New King James Version* it reads: “When He utters His voice, There is a multitude of waters in the heavens: ‘And He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, He brings the wind out of His treasuries.’ ” The words are identical to what we read in one of the Psalms.⁴ R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* observes: Several words have apparently dropped out of verse 13, and LXX omits the first colon completely. Cf. 51:16, where, however, LXX reads them.” We do not know for sure what the condition of our planet was weather-wise before sin entered and before Noah’s flood disturbed the ecological balance. It could be that thunder and lightning were at that time not part of the picture. It seems a logical suggestion that God expresses His wrath in Mother Nature’s anger. No one experiences thunder and lightning as pleasant and peaceful manifestations.

Within the framework of comparison between God and the idols, God’s awesome voice of thunder and the dead, wooden silence of the idol statues convincingly prove the difference. In v.16 God calls Himself “the portion of Jacob.” What this means is beautifully illustrated in what God had said to Aaron: “You will have no *inheritance* in their land, nor will you have any share among them; I am your share and your *inheritance* among the Israelites.”⁵

22. The nearness of exile 10:17-25

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1. Ex. 9:16
 2. Ex. 28:3
 3. I Kings 4:29
 4. See Ps. 135:7.
 5. Num. 18:20

17 Gather up your belongings to leave the land, you who live under siege.

18 For this is what the Lord says: "At this time I will hurl out those who live in this land; I will bring distress on them so that they may be captured."

19 Woe to me because of my injury! My wound is incurable! Yet I said to myself, "This is my sickness, and I must endure it."

20 My tent is destroyed; all its ropes are snapped. My sons are gone from me and are no more; no one is left now to pitch my tent or to set up my shelter.

21 The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered.

22 Listen! The report is coming — a great commotion from the land of the north! It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals.

23 I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.

24 Correct me, Lord, but only with justice — not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.

25 Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states by way of introduction to this section: "The long-predicted catastrophe is now at the very gates of Jerusalem, and Judean society is in imminent danger of collapse. Jeremiah pleads that the punishment will be in proportion to what Judah can endure. The time for weeping has ended, and the weary journey to Babylonia begins. Judah is summoned to pick up her bundle of belongings (17) and go on the long trek into captivity. This is the time when the people will be expelled from their land and receive their just desserts. Verses 19 and 20 express in the language of the semi-nomads the appalling desolation of the nation, likened to a collapsed tent. Incompetent leadership (AV *pastors*; RV *shepherds*) is regarded as the main cause of the calamity (cf. 2:8). For the expectation of restoration, cf. Isaiah 54:2. Activity in Babylonia (22) indicates that Judah's doom is at hand, and this evidently prompted Jeremiah to plead, by way of extenuation, the basic moral weakness of man and his congruent inability to overcome temptation consistently and walk uprightly before God. Therefore he prays that divine judgment will be applied without undue severity, and certainly not in anger (cf. 46:28). This latter fate should be reserved for pagan nations which have preyed on the Israelites in the past, including, presumably, those used as the retributive rod of divine anger, since in their vindictiveness they exceeded what He had prescribed. That Jacob should need to be punished in this way was the tragic consequence of continued apostasy. However, the servants of sin invariably receive their characteristic reward (cf. Rom. 1:18)."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: "This passage connects itself immediately with Jeremiah 9, where the invasion of Judah and the dispersion of its inhabitants have been foretold. Here, after describing dramatically the departure of the latter into exile, the prophet reports a distinct revelation of the same fact, so that this can no longer be assumed to be mere imaginative rhetoric. The Jewish people is then introduced, lamenting her sad fate, but expressing resignation."

We may read v.17 as Jeremiah speaking to the people and v.18, as is obvious, as the Lord's verdict. What Jeremiah says can be compared to Amos' words to Israel: "Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel."¹

I am not quite convinced that vv.19-21 contains the complaints of the people as they are being led away. The passage could be read as Jeremiah's moan over the fate of his beloved nation. That would make these verses a better bridge to what is stated in the agonizing verses 22-25. We could even hear some of God's own sadness in these words.

1. Amos 4:12

It is tempting to quote v.23 out of context: “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps,” as there is a general principle revealed in it. But seen in the light of the surrounding verses, it refers obviously to the people who are taken into captivity.

The recognition that God created human life and that consequently man is held responsible for the way he lives it, is salutary. Yet, most people live as if they own themselves and will never be called upon to give account. Solomon states clearly in *Proverbs*: “To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man’s ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”¹ Also: “A man’s steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?”² It was this attitude of independence, this living without taking God’s will into account that brought about the captivity.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary applies the verse, not to Israel or Judah, but to her conquerors, stating: “I know, O Yahweh, that the march of the Babylonian conqueror against me (Jeremiah identifying himself with his people) is not at his own discretion, but is overruled by thee (Isa 10:5-7, ‘O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger ... against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge;’ cf. Jer 10:19).”

It is true that God used Assyria and Babylonian’s imperialistic tendencies to punish Israel and Judah, but that does not mean that these nations took their orders from the Almighty. As a matter of fact they acted the way they did out of rebellion against God’s authority. In carrying out God’s judgment they went way beyond the limit God had intended for them and, consequently they created their own destruction. That punishment is what Jeremiah calls for in v.25. Centuries earlier, Asaph had prayed the same prayer when Jerusalem was invaded by its neighboring nations. We read in the Psalms: “Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name; for they have devoured Jacob and destroyed his homeland.”³ Zechariah would later describe God’s anger against the nations that treated Israel and Judah beyond the mandate given to them. We read: “For this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘After he has honored me and has sent me against the nations that have plundered you — for whoever touches you touches the apple of his eye — I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves will plunder them. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me.’ ”⁴

23. The prophet and the covenant 11:1-12-17

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 "Listen to the terms of this covenant and tell them to the people of Judah and to those who live in Jerusalem.

3 Tell them that this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant —

4 the terms I commanded your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the iron-smelting furnace.’ I said, ‘Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God.

5 Then I will fulfill the oath I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey’ — the land you possess today." I answered, "Amen, Lord."

6 The Lord said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: ‘Listen to the terms of this covenant and follow them.

7 From the time I brought your forefathers up from Egypt until today, I warned them again and again, saying, "Obey me."

1. Prov. 16:1-3

2. Prov. 20:24

3. Ps. 79:6,7

4. Zech. 2:8,9

8 But they did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep.'"

9 Then the Lord said to me, "There is a conspiracy among the people of Judah and those who live in Jerusalem.

10 They have returned to the sins of their forefathers, who refused to listen to my words. They have followed other gods to serve them. Both the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken the covenant I made with their forefathers.

11 Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them.

12 The towns of Judah and the people of Jerusalem will go and cry out to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they will not help them at all when disaster strikes.

13 You have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah; and the altars you have set up to burn incense to that shameful god Baal are as many as the streets of Jerusalem.'

14 "Do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them, because I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their distress.

15 "What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert [your punishment]? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice."

16 The Lord called you a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm he will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken.

17 The Lord Almighty, who planted you, has decreed disaster for you, because the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done evil and provoked me to anger by burning incense to Baal.

18 Because the Lord revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at that time he showed me what they were doing.

19 I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more."

20 But, O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

21 "Therefore this is what the Lord says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, 'Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hands' —

22 therefore this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine.

23 Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment.'"

12:1 You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?

2 You have planted them, and they have taken root; they grow and bear fruit. You are always on their lips but far from their hearts.

3 Yet you know me, O Lord; you see me and test my thoughts about you. Drag them off like sheep to be butchered! Set them apart for the day of slaughter!

4 How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished. Moreover, the people are saying, "He will not see what happens to us."

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

6 Your brothers, your own family — even they have betrayed you; they have raised a loud cry against you. Do not trust them, though they speak well of you.

7 "I will forsake my house, abandon my inheritance; I will give the one I love into the hands of her enemies.

8 My inheritance has become to me like a lion in the forest. She roars at me; therefore I hate her.

9 Has not my inheritance become to me like a speckled bird of prey that other birds of prey surround and attack? Go and gather all the wild beasts; bring them to devour.

10 Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland.

11 It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares.

12 Over all the barren heights in the desert destroyers will swarm, for the sword of the Lord will devour from one end of the land to the other; no one will be safe.

13 They will sow wheat but reap thorns; they will wear themselves out but gain nothing. So bear the shame of your harvest because of the Lord's fierce anger."

14 This is what the Lord says: "As for all my wicked neighbors who seize the inheritance I gave my people Israel, I will uproot them from their lands and I will uproot the house of Judah from among them.

15 But after I uproot them, I will again have compassion and will bring each of them back to his own inheritance and his own country.

16 And if they learn well the ways of my people and swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives' — even as they once taught my people to swear by Baal — then they will be established among my people.

17 But if any nation does not listen, I will completely uproot and destroy it," declares the Lord.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, says about this section: "Two dates have been suggested for this passage. The first would relate it to the time of Jehoiakim, perhaps a little before Nebuchadnezzar's victory over Egypt at Carchemish in 605 BC. The second would place it after the discovery of the law scroll by Hilkiyah in the days of Josiah, about 621 BC, and thus connect it with the ensuing religious reformation (*cf.* 2 Ki. 22-23). The latter view is now generally accepted by scholars. The reforms included a recall to the traditions of Mosaic religion and a determined assault upon pagan cultic forms. According to 2 Chronicles 34, centralization of worship at Jerusalem had preceded the discovery of the scroll. As a result the debased rites of Canaanite religion were discontinued at local shrines. Jeremiah may have seized on the opportunity afforded by public reading of the law scroll to recall Judah's attention to the provisions of the Sinai covenant. However, the precise nature and content of the scroll are unknown."

The Pulpit Commentary suggests the following outline of the section:

1. A reminder of the renewal of the covenant between Jehovah and the people lately made under Josiah (Jeremiah 11:1-8).
2. First stage of the conspiracy; all Israel, instead of keeping the covenant with Jehovah, conspires against him (Jeremiah 11:9-13).
3. The punishment of the conspiracy is an irreversible, severe judgment (Jeremiah 11:14-17).
4. Second stage of the conspiracy; the plot of the men of Anathoth (Jeremiah 11:18-23).
5. Third stage; the plot in the prophet's own family (Jeremiah 11:1-6).
6. Israel's conspiracy punished by a conspiracy of the neighboring peoples against Israel (Jeremiah 12:7-13).
7. Removal of all antitheses by the final union of all in the Lord (Jeremiah 12:14-17).

God commands Jeremiah to remind Judah of the Constitution upon which her identity as a nation stands. The exodus from Egypt constituted the birth of a nation. Thus far they had been an extended family consisting of slaves. God delivered them and gave them freedom and dignity, making them into a kingdom of priests.¹ V.3 is a quotation from Moses' instructions to the people shortly before they entered Canaan.

1. Ex. 19:6

Moses had said: “When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.”¹ The people were to respond to the antiphonal blessings and curses by saying: “Amen.” Jeremiah must have been cognizant of this because we read in v.5 that he responds: “Amen, Lord.” The words quoted read originally: “ ‘Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.’ Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’ ”²

The Hebrew word *‘arar*, “curse” literally means “to execrate.” It is rarely used in the relationship between God and man. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God did not curse them, but He cursed Satan who caused the fall of mankind and the ground from which man was taken. We read: “So the Lord God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life,’ ”³ and: “To Adam he said, ‘Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’ ‘Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.’ ”⁴ But when God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel, the breaking off of that relationship would bring Israel under the curse which was originally reserved for Satan.

This curse is specifically related to the practice of idolatry, which leads man into enemy territory. This curse is lifted for us in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. As the Apostle Paul writes: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.”⁵

The Holy Spirit has lifted the curse and works obedience in our hearts. Obedience is based on love. The essence of the covenant is love, as is written: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.”⁶ And Jesus says: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”⁷ Those are the terms of the covenant Jeremiah was ordered to proclaim throughout the land of Judah.

God calls Judah’s refusal to keep the terms of the covenant “a conspiracy,” *qesher* in Hebrew. This is the only time the word is used in Jeremiah. It has the meaning of “treason.”

The message God gave to Jeremiah suggests that Judah had reached the point of no return. But if this were the case, what would be the point of preaching at all? God’s announcement of judgment is always an act of grace. *The Book of Jonah* proves this.

V.13 reads literally in Hebrew: “For according to the number of your cities were your gods, o Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have you set up altars to that shameful thing [even] altars to burn incense unto Baal.” “That shameful thing” is the translation of the Hebrew word *bosheth*, which means “shame,” both in the sense of the feeling and the condition, as well as its cause. It often refers to an idol. It sometimes refers to a person’s private parts as in the verse: “Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, ‘You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you have

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1. Deut. 27:12,13
 2. Deut. 27:26
 3. Gen. 3:14
 4. Gen. 3:17-19
 5. Gal. 3:13,14
 6. Deut. 6:5,6
 7. John 14:15

sided with the son of Jesse to your own *shame* and to *the shame* of the mother who bore you?’ ”¹ This may refer to the immoral sexual practices that accompanied the worship of Baal.

V.14 calls into question whether there is a limit to intercessory prayer. That is what this verse seems to imply. The Apostle John mentions that kind of situation, saying: “If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death.”² But John does not specifically say that prayer would be wrong, merely that it would be ineffective. That is what God seemed to say to Ezekiel: “Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord.”³

Barnes’ Notes observes here: “Prayer for others for the forgiveness of their sins avails only when they also pray. The cry of the people now was that of the guilty smarting under punishment, not of the penitent mourning over sin.” And *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* concludes: “Their measure is full,” referring to what God had said to Abraham about the original inhabitants of Canaan: “In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”⁴

Matthew Henry’s Commentary takes a milder approach, saying: “Jeremiah’s prayers shall not help them, v. 14. What God had said to him before (ch. 7:16) he here says again, Pray not thou for this people. This is not designed for a command to the prophet, so much as for a threatening to the people, that they should have no benefit by the prayers of their friends for them. God would give no encouragement to the prophets to pray for them, would not stir up the spirit of prayer, but cast a damp upon it, would put it into their hearts to pray, not for the body of the people, but for the remnant among them, to pray for their eternal salvation, not for their deliverance from the temporal judgments that were coming upon them; and what other prayers were put up for them should not be heard. Those are in a sad case indeed that are cut off from the benefit of prayer. ‘I will not hear them when they cry, and therefore do not thou pray for them.’ Note, Those that have so far thrown themselves out of God’s favor that he will not hear their prayers cannot expect benefit by the prayers of others for them.”

The best conclusion we can come to in connection with the problem of interceding for certain people is that we must discern the will of God in all our prayers. The Bible makes it clear that God wants everybody to be saved.⁵ In some cases resisting God’s command to cease intercession may be effective, as it was with Moses. After God had told Moses that He would no longer go with the people to the Promised Land and Moses had said that, in that case, he would not go either, God changed His mind and said: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give your rest,” upon which Moses said: “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.”⁶ Real intercessors will not take “no” for an answer.

V.15 has presented Bible scholars with problems. The Hebrew text reads literally: “What [has] my beloved [to do] in my house, [seeing] she has wrought lewdness with many, [the] holy flesh has passed from you? When [you do] evil then you rejoice.” When the words in brackets that are meant to provide more clarity are taken away not much is left that can be understood. *The New International Version*, in a footnote, gives the alternate reading: “Could consecrated meat avert your punishment? / Then you would rejoice.”

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1. I Sam. 20:30
 2. I John 5:16,17
 3. Ezek. 14:13,14
 4. Gen. 15:16
 5. I Tim. 2: 4; II Peter 3:9
 6. See Ex. 33:14,15.

R. K. Harrison in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* states: “Verse 15 cannot be translated intelligibly. A suggested rendering is, *What business has my cherished one in my house, when she has perpetrated vile schemes? Can vows and sacrificed flesh remove your wickedness?*”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The Divine Speaker expresses surprise that one who has now so poor a claim to the title of ‘my beloved’ should appear in his holy house. It is spoken in the spirit of that earlier revelation of Isaiah, ‘When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts?’ (... Isaiah 1:12). The Jews, it would seem, came to the temple to pray, but their prayer is not accepted, because it is associated with unholy practices. They thought by formal prayers and sacrifices to pay off their debt to the Deity, and so be free to go on with their old devices (as in ... Jeremiah 7:15). This seems the best view of the difficult words which follow, but it implies a correction of the certainly ungrammatical rendering of the Authorized Version — **seeing she hath wrought lewdness** — into *to work their wicked device*. But here begins the most obscure part of the verse. **With many** cannot be right; for ‘with’ has nothing corresponding to it in the Hebrew; the word in the original simply means ‘the many,’ and as it is immediately followed by a noun in the singular with ‘and,’ and a verb in the plural, it is plain that it must (if correctly read) be part of the subject of the latter. The Septuagint, however, has a different reading, which may very well be correct, and out of which the received Hebrew reading may easily have grown — ‘Can vows and holy [i.e. hallowed] flesh remove from thee thy wickedness [or perhaps, ‘thy calamity’]?’ The connection thus becomes easy. ‘Vows and holy flesh’ (i.e. the flesh of sacrifices, ... Haggai 2:12), naturally go together; the only other possible way of taking the passage (assuming the correctness of the ‘received text’) — ‘the great ones and the holy flesh shall pass away from thee’ — is obviously inadmissible. ‘Vows and sacrifices,’ however, precisely express the true association of ideas. A man made a vow, and he generally paid it in the form of a sacrifice. But, inquires Jehovah, ‘Can such vows and such victims please God, and expiate thy wickedness [or, ‘avert thy calamity’]? *Then thou mightest rejoice.*’ The latter words are not, indeed, more exact than those of the Authorized Version, but are in accordance with grammar, and suit the preceding question. It is not certain, however, that the text is right here.”

All these text-critical problems aside, we must wonder at the fact that God uses the word “my beloved” in connection with Judah. The Hebrew word *yedyd*, “beloved” is used at the birth of Solomon. We read: “The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.”¹ Judah’s sin has not changed God’s passionate love. That does, however, not mean that they will not come into judgment for their sins. Judah’s condition can be compared to a married man who keeps on telling his wife he loves her, while at the same time carrying on adulterous affairs with other women.

In v.16 Israel is compared to an olive tree, which has become its national symbol. Lightning will strike it and set it on fire and hurricane winds will tear off its branches. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “The setting of fire to the olive tree Israel came about through its enemies, who broke up one part of the kingdom after the other, who had already destroyed the kingdom of the ten tribes, and were now about to destroy Judah next. That the words apply not to Judah only, but to Israel as well, appears from v. 17, where the Lord, who has planted Israel, is said to have spoken, i.e., decreed evil for the sin of the two houses, Israel and Judah.”

The Apostle Paul refers to this form of judgment and explains that Israel’s judgment created the opportunity for the gentiles to accept the Gospel. We read in Romans: “If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. If you do, consider this: You do not support the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that

1. II Sam. 12:24,25

you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!”¹

The judgment over Israel is exemplified in Jesus’ treatment of an olive tree that did not bear the fruit He expected. The tree is different, but the principle of judgment is the same. We read: “Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked. Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.’”²

The people of Anathoth, Jeremiah’s hometown had plotted to kill the prophet. He had not been aware of this until God revealed their plans to him. We do not hear whether this revelation came to him in a supernatural way or along natural channels as in the case of the Apostle Paul. In Paul’s case his nephew heard about a conspiracy to assassinate Paul, which was reported to the centurion who held Paul in custody. This officer whisked Paul away during the night, thus preventing the plot from being carried out.³

Not being aware of the plot, Jeremiah sees himself as a lamb destined for the slaughter. The Hebrew test uses the words *kebes* ‘*alluwph*, “lamb” and “ox.” The word ‘*alluwph* actually means “friend,” or “gentle.” It is sometimes used for “ox,” because the animal is domesticated. Most Bible scholars read the words as “pet lamb.” *The Jamieson Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes that it is “a pet lamb of not more than a year old, such as the Jews often had in their houses, for their children to play with; and the Arabs still have (2 Sam 12:3).” *The Commentary* states: “The language is exactly the same as that applied to Messiah (Isa 53:7). Each prophet and patriarch exemplified in his own person some one feature or more in the manifold attributes and sufferings of the Messiah to come; just as the saints have done since His coming (Gal 2:20; Phil 3:10; Col 1:24). This adapted both the more experimentally to testify of Christ.”

In our Western households lambs are unusually not kept as pets, but they evidently were in the Middle East. In the reference of II Samuel, the prophet Nathan uses it as an illustration of David’s sin with Bathsheba. We read: “The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”⁴

The Pulpit Commentary suggests that “Let us destroy the tree and its fruit” is a proverbial expression. The Hebrew word *lechem* seems to refer particularly to bread, as in the verse: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.”⁵ Bible scholars have argued about the legitimacy of the translation “food,” instead of “bread.” “Food” seems to fit the context well. *The Pulpit Commentary* ridicules Jerome who followed *The Septuagint* in the rendering: “Let us put wood in his bread.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains about the context: “The Anathoth priests had lived there since the time of Solomon (I Ki. 2:26ff.), and by force of circumstances were excluded from

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1. Rom. 11:17-24
 2. Matt. 21:19-22
 3. See Acts 23:12-35.
 4. II Sam. 12:1-4
 5. Gen. 3:19 – (*New King James Version*)

priestly functions in Jerusalem. Perhaps their jealousy of Jeremiah’s support for Josiah’s reforms stirred up their opposition. Although God had given the prophet some warning, his relationship to the people of Anathoth was that of an animal which is completely unaware of the intentions of its owner to slaughter it. The resentment of the townsmen was evidently aroused when Jeremiah, the son of a prophet, actively supported the suppression of local shrines in conformity with Josiah’s legislation. Hence the native sons wished to destroy the prophetic tree *with its fruit*. ... Jeremiah was not to be deterred from prophesying, however, being assured that none of the conspirators would survive. According to Ezra 2:23, 128 men of Anathoth returned to post-exilic Judaea.”

Jeremiah’s reaction to hearing about the plot does not sound very “Christian” to us from a New Testament perspective. He cries for vengeance, and receives it! *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Jeremiah’s wish for vengeance, ‘Let me see thy vengeance upon them,’ was not personal, but ministerial, and accorded with God’s purpose revealed to him against the enemies alike of God and of His servant (Ps 37:34; 54:7; 112:8; 118:7).” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* suggests “I shall see your vengeance upon them” would be more correct that “let me ...” There is a parallel passage in a later chapter;¹ where “I shall see ...” seems to be the better rendering also.

The fact that Jeremiah refers to God as the righteous judge, who takes into consideration the motives as well as the plea, suggests that the prophet wondered if his wish for revenge was legitimate and in harmony with the relationship he had with God. The fact that God gave Jeremiah order to announce a verdict to these people indicates that he was not just acting on the basis of personal hurt. Yet, as we saw above, punishment was not carried out in its totality since there were men from Anathoth who returned from captivity. The application of God’s judgment is always conditional upon people’s repentance.

Barnes’ Notes states: “Some divide Jer 12 into three extracts (vv.12:1-6,12:7-13,12:14-17) from discourses of Jeremiah not preserved at length; others regard it as a connected discourse occasioned by a drought in the days of Josiah (compare Jer 12:4); others see in the ‘evil neighbors’ (Jer 12:14), an allusion to the bands of Syrians etc., who infested the land after Jehoiakim’s revolt from Nebuchadnezzar. More probably the outburst of expostulation (Jer 12:1-4) was occasioned by the plot of the men of Anathoth, and upon it the rest follows naturally.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states by way of introduction: “These verses introduce a formal statement of the problem of godless prosperity. The age-old question as to why the wicked should flourish received no direct answer, however, here as elsewhere in Scripture. Instead, Jeremiah is instructed to prepare himself for a yet greater assault on his faith and courage. The statement is based upon the concept of God as being just and irrefutable in argument, though amenable to complaints. The image of planting, implying stability (*cf.* Is. 40:24; Ps. 1:3), shows that prosperity is not accidental, but is part of God’s general provision for human needs (*cf.* Mt. 5:45; Lk. 6:35). Although the people use the divine name frequently in speech, they are actually hypocrites who are divorces spiritually from God. *Cf.* Isaiah 29:13, as quoted by Christ in Matthew 15:8 and Mark 7:6. Thus their wickedness is even more appalling by comparison with Jeremiah’s own fidelity, and he demands to know how much longer such behavior will go unpunished, coming very close in the process to the nadir of despair. God replies that his past sufferings are nothing compared to what will happen in the future. If he stumbled in home territory, how could he be expected to fare in Jerusalem? In common with Jeremiah, Christ and Paul, most Christians have to face a ‘Jerusalem experience’ if their witness has to have more than a purely local effect.”

Jeremiah touches indeed upon the age-old mystery of God’s way of dealing with sin. Our human instinct tells us that judgment should be swift and instantaneous. The way God treats sinners seems to encourage sinful behavior rather than to punish it. There are a few instances in Scripture where God reacted immediately to insults against His holiness and then it seemed to be an overreaction rather than an application of justice. Uzzah’s well-intended effort to save the ark from falling caused his death. We read: “When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God,

1. See Jer. 20:11,12.

because the oxen stumbled. The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God. Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah."¹ The death of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament is another example.² Asaph struggled with this problem in one of his psalms, saying: "As for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong." He came to the conclusion: "This is what the wicked are like — always carefree, they increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been plagued; I have been punished every morning. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."³

Jeremiah is not alone in his questioning of God's righteousness. There is even a hint of a question mark in Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah. We read: "Then Abraham approached [God] and said: 'Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing — to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?' "⁴

The Matthew Henry's Commentary penetrates to the core of the problem: "When we are most in the dark concerning the meaning of God's dispensations we must still resolve to keep up right thoughts of God, and must be confident of this, that he never did, nor ever will do, the least wrong to any of his creatures; even when his judgments are unsearchable as a great deep, and altogether unaccountable, yet his righteousness is as conspicuous and immovable as the great mountains, Ps 36:6. Though sometimes clouds and darkness are round about him, yet justice and judgment are always the habitation of his throne, Ps 97:2. When we find it hard to understand particular providences we must have recourse to general truths as our first principles, and abide by them; however dark the providence may be, the Lord is righteous; see Ps 73:1. And we must acknowledge it to him, as the prophet here, even when we plead with him, as those that have no thoughts of contending but of learning, being fully assured that he will be justified when he speaks. Note, however we may see cause for our own information to plead with God, yet it becomes us to own that, whatever he says or does, he is in the right."

The problem of pain is that it remains a problem. It seems that there is no final answer and that the answers we find are not easy ones. It is part of the image of God in us that allows us to question Him. At the same time, when we do question God and He listens to us, we discover that He owes us no explanation or apology. That is the message in *The Book of Job*. When Job discovered to whom he had been talking, he said: "Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."⁵

If we place Jeremiah's words against the background of the assassination plot against him, we understand that he asks God to make the conspiracy backfire and do to his enemies what they planned to do to him. The sons of Korah applied the image of the sheep to be slaughtered to the faithful of Israel in a verse quoted by the Apostle Paul in connection with Christians: "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."⁶

Jeremiah does recognize that God is not completely ignoring the condition of the people. These words are probably said during the great drought about which he speaks in greater detail in a later chapter.⁷

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1. II Sam 6:6-8
 2. See Acts 5:1-11.
 3. Ps 73:3-4, 12-14, 16,17
 4. Gen. 18:23-25
 5. Job 42:3,5,6
 6. Ps. 44:22; Rom. 8:36

The Hebrew text of v.4 reads literally: “How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? The beasts and the birds are consumed because they said He shall not see our last end.”

Most Bible scholars interpret v.5 as God speaking to Jeremiah and chiding him for his impatience. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states: “In vv. 5 and 6 the Lord so answers the prophet’s complaint as to reprove his impatience, by intimating that he will have to endure still worse. Both parts of v. 5 are of the nature of proverbs. If even the race with footmen made him weary, how will he be able to compete with horses? The proverb exhibits the contrast between tasks of smaller and greater difficulty, applied to the prophet’s relation to his enemies. What Jeremiah had to suffer from his countrymen at Anathoth was but a trifle compared with the malign assaults that yet awaited him in the discharge of his office. The second comparison conveys the same thought, but with a clearer intimation of the dangers the prophet will undergo. If thou puttest thy trust in a peaceful land, there alone countest on living in peace and safety, how wilt thou bear thyself in the glory of Jordan? The latter phrase does not mean the swelling of Jordan, its high flood, so as that we should ... have here to think of the danger arising from a great and sudden inundation. It is the strip of land along the bank of the Jordan, thickly overgrown with shrubs, trees, and tall reeds, the lower valley, flooded when the river was swollen, where lions had their haunt, as in the reedy thickets of the Euphrates.” The Commentary concludes: “In this reproof of the prophet there lies not merely the truth that much sorer suffering yet awaits him, but the truth besides, that the people’s faithlessness and wickedness towards God and men will yet grow greater, ere the judgment of destruction fall upon Judah; for the divine long-suffering is not yet exhausted, nor has ungodliness yet fairly reached its highest point, so that the final destruction must straightway be carried out. But judgment will not tarry long. This thought is carried on in what follows.”

God warns him against his own family from whom he might have expected understanding and protection. People who ought to have been intimate with him would give him a Judas kiss. Jesus warns His disciples that they would experience the same while preaching the Gospel. We read: “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”¹

One reason why God allowed Jeremiah to pass through these painful experiences is to make him feel what God feels about the spiritual condition of the people He had chosen and loved. Vv.7-13 deal with God’s problem with Judah. They had been chosen to be the kingdom of priests through which He could reveal Himself to the rest of the world, but they had aligned themselves with God’s enemy.

God had considered Israel to be His inheritance, as Moses had prayed: “O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, ... then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.”² Elsewhere in Scripture this relationship is described as a marriage. Judah’s unfaithfulness has caused the breakup. It was not merely a cessation of an intimate relationship, it was a complete reversal. The image of the lion in the forest shows Judah, not just abandoning God, but as attacking Him. The speckled bird of prey image reflects the same situation Jeremiah encountered in relation with the people of his hometown Anathoth, but the attacking birds are now the surrounding nations falling upon Judah. The Hebrew words are *ʾayit* for “a hawk or other bird of prey,” *tsabuwa* for “dyed,” or “striped,” as a hyena. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The passage is difficult, but the following seems the most plausible explanation: — Jehovah is represented as surprised to see his chosen people a prey to the heathen (a strongly anthropomorphic description, as if Jehovah had not anticipated that his ‘giving up’ his people would have such sad results). It seems to him (adopting human modes of speech) as if Israel were ‘a colored bird of prey,’ the bright plumage of which excites the animosity of its less brilliant comrades, who gather round it and pull it to pieces.”

7. See Jer. Chapter 14.
 1. Matt. 10:21
 2. Ex. 34:9

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about these verses: “Here Jeremiah speaks of the forthcoming devastation of the land. By rendering the verbs as prophetic perfects, the reference is to a future catastrophe as though it had already occurred. This may further be construed as a reply to Jeremiah stating that, though prosperous at present, the wicked were actually poised on the brink of disaster. As Jeremiah’s family had treated him, so the nation has treated its God, roaring hostility and defiance at the One whom their fathers had pledged to obey. The prophet is thus able to sense afresh the sorrow and regret of a God who is forced to reject His people. Rebellious Judah will now be as conspicuous as *a speckled bird* (NEB *hyena’s lair*), whose unusual plumage provokes the enmity of other predators. So the inhabitants of the southern kingdom, being different from other nations, would be attacked by them, and God’s *pleasant portion* would be no more. The *shepherds* are the leaders (cf. 2:8) who have furnished improper guidance, and they will see their homeland ravaged as God brings judgment upon the nation.”

Moses had said about Canaan: “The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the Lord your God cares for; the eyes of the Lord your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.”¹ But now, the land of milk and honey would turn into a desert. The sins of the people would cause the climate to change, causing devastating droughts. Could it be that the present problem of global warming modern scientists have issued is related to the moral behavior of this world’s population?

“The destroyer” in v.12 is the rendering of the Hebrew word *shadad*, which has a variety of meaning, from “to be burly, to “to ravage.” The word first occurs in Deborah’s song about Jael’s killing of Sisera: “At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay. At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell - *dead*.”² Jeremiah uses it more frequently than any other Biblical author, twenty-six times.

The sword of the Lord, the arm that Gideon used against Israel’s enemies,³ is turned here against God’s people. The author of Hebrews uses the expression for the Word of God: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”⁴ The same Word that created the world is now the instrument of destruction. The curse that hit creation when Adam fell in sin is here repeated for the people of God: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”⁵ The thorn and thistles are called “the shame of your harvest.”

But in the last five verses of this chapter God hides a blessing in the curse. They who would be the instruments of carrying out the punishment upon Judah, the birds of prey that fell upon her, will at the end participate in the restored blessing the Lord plans to pour out upon His people. We may see in this a prophecy of Gentiles joining Israel in the church of Jesus Christ. There is an amazing reversal in v.16. In spite of all the warnings God had issued about the contagious danger of the pagan religions of Canaan, Israel had followed the way of the Gentiles. The native tribes of the country had taught them to swear by Baal. God had called Israel into being for the purpose of making the whole world to “swear by [God’s] name, saying, ‘As surely as the Lord lives.’ ” But the rot of paganism had won. God has not given up His plan of salvation. In Jesus’ words: “salvation is from the Jews.”⁶ Thus the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities as well as the

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1. Deut. 11:10-12
 2. Judg. 5:27
 3. Judg. 7:20
 4. Heb. 4:12
 5. Gen. 3:17-19
 6. John 4:22

Diaspora after the destruction of Jerusalem, become symbols of God's offer of salvation that can be accepted or rejected. Israel, or rather the most important member of the Jewish race has become pivotal in the salvation of the world. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."¹

4. Fourth oracle—the broken covenant and the sign of the waistband (11-13)

24. Five warnings 13:1-27

1 This is what the Lord said to me: "Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not let it touch water."

2 So I bought a belt, as the Lord directed, and put it around my waist.

3 Then the word of the Lord came to me a second time:

4 "Take the belt you bought and are wearing around your waist, and go now to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks."

5 So I went and hid it at Perath, as the Lord told me.

6 Many days later the Lord said to me, "Go now to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there."

7 So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless.

8 Then the word of the Lord came to me:

9 "This is what the Lord says: 'In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

10 These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt — completely useless!

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

12 "Say to them: 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Every wineskin should be filled with wine.' And if they say to you, 'Don't we know that every wineskin should be filled with wine?'

13 then tell them, 'This is what the Lord says: I am going to fill with drunkenness all who live in this land, including the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets and all those living in Jerusalem.

14 I will smash them one against the other, fathers and sons alike, declares the Lord. I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep me from destroying them.'"

15 Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken.

16 Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom.

17 But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.

18 Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Come down from your thrones, for your glorious crowns will fall from your heads."

19 The cities in the Negev will be shut up, and there will be no one to open them. All Judah will be carried into exile, carried completely away.

20 Lift up your eyes and see those who are coming from the north. Where is the flock that was entrusted to you, the sheep of which you boasted?

21 What will you say when [the Lord] sets over you those you cultivated as your special allies? Will not pain grip you like that of a woman in labor?

1. Acts 4:12

22 *And if you ask yourself, "Why has this happened to me?" — it is because of your many sins that your skirts have been torn off and your body mistreated.*

23 *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil.*

24 *"I will scatter you like chaff driven by the desert wind.*

25 *This is your lot, the portion I have decreed for you," declares the Lord, "because you have forgotten me and trusted in false gods.*

26 *I will pull up your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen —*

27 *your adulteries and lustful neighings, your shameless prostitution! I have seen your detestable acts on the hills and in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean?"*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, identifies these five warnings in this chapter: Vv.1-11, The first warning; vv.12-14, The second warning; vv.15-17, The third warning; vv.18,19, The fourth warning; and vv.20-27, The fifth warning.

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this section with: "The chapter falls into two parts — the one describing a divinely commanded action of the prophet, symbolical of the approaching rejection of the Jewish people, the other announcing in literal language the ruin especially of the king and the queen-mother, and emphasizing the inveterate corruption which rendered such a blow necessary. The mention of the queen-mother (see Ver. 18) renders it probable that Jehoiachin is the king under whom the prophecy was composed. It is true that other kings besides Jehoiachin ascended the throne in the lifetime of their mother; but the express and repeated mention of the queen-mother in the account of Jehoiachin (... 2 Kings 24:12, 15; comp. ... Jeremiah 29:2; 22:26) warrants the inference that Nehushta, Jehoiachin's mother, was a more powerful personage than other queen-mothers. This will be confirmed if ... we accept the statement of the text of the Chronicles (... 2 Chronicles 36:9), that Jehoiachin was eight (not eighteen) years old on his accession."

Bible scholars have debated the meaning of the Hebrew word 'ezowr, translated in *The New International Version* as "a belt." *The New Living Translation* reads: "This is what the Lord said to me: 'Go and buy a linen loincloth and put it on, but do not wash it.'" *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "'Girdle' is one of the meanings of the Hebrew ('ezor), but is here unsuitable. As Ver. 11 shows, it is an inner garment that is meant, one that 'cleaveth to the loins of a man.' ... The corresponding Arabic word, 'izar, has ... the meaning of 'waist-wrapper.' Israel was to Jehovah in as close a relation spiritually as that in which the inner garment referred to is to him who wears it materially. There is an Arabic proverb which well illustrates this: 'He is to me in place of an 'izar' ... 'A linen apron' may perhaps be specified, because linen was the material of the priestly dress (... Leviticus 16:4), and Israel was to be spiritually 'a kingdom of priests.' But this is not absolutely necessary. The common man used linen in his dress as well as the priest; the only difference between them was that the priest was confined to linen garments. But an, 'apron' would in any case naturally be made of linen."

Another point of contention among Bible scholars is whether the symbolic act Jeremiah was ordered to perform was carried out in a literal or imaginary sense and whether "Perath" refers to the Euphrates River or to a place in Israel. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, for instance, states: "Many of these figurative acts being either not possible or not probable or decorous seem to have existed only in the mind of the prophet as part of his inward vision (so Calvin). The world he moved in was not the sensible, but the spiritual world. Inward acts were, however, when it was possible and proper, materialized by outward performance; but not always and necessarily so. The internal act made a naked statement more impressive, and presented the subject, when extending over long portions of space and time, more concentrated. The interruption of Jeremiah's official duty by a journey of more than 200 miles twice is not likely to have literally taken place." But *Barnes' Notes* comments: "After the burning of the scroll in the fourth year of Jehoiakim Jeremiah disappeared from Jerusalem, and did not show himself there again for seven years. In the last few mournful days of Jehoiakim, he was once again seen in the streets of Jerusalem,

with his prophetic robe of black camel's hair girt about with this girdle, mildewed and water stained as the symbol of the pitiable estate of a nation which had rejected its God. His place of refuge may have been near the Euphrates. Many such acts alleged to have been performed by the prophets may have been allegories, but this we believe to have been literally true."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: "The first warning, conveyed by the acted parable of the ruined linen loincloth, made clear that idolatry, with its attendant moral corruptions, would be the ruin of the people. The nation had been attached closely to God in former days, but because of recent apostasy had become soiled and now was to be discarded. The prophetic symbolism rests upon the utility of articles in everyday life. The *waistcloth* was one of the more intimate forms of clothing, clinging closely to the body of the wearer and serving as a thigh-length underskirt. Had it been immersed in water it would have been softer and more pliable. Symbolically, the nation had to be guarded against all deleterious influences. If *Perath* was the literal Euphrates, typifying the land of captivity, it would have involved Jeremiah in a journey of at least 500 miles. Otherwise the reference could be to the town of Parah (Jos. 18:23), about three miles north-east of Anathoth, located on the modern Wadi Farah. The cleft (AV *hole*; NEB *Perath*) would probably be in the Carchemish area if Jeremiah actually visited the Euphrates. The damaged waistcloth indicated that proud Judah would be humbled and punished for her idolatry. God had wanted her to cling to Him in loyalty and faith, but instead she had shaped her destiny of ruin through intimacy with pagan deities."

We may assume that Jeremiah gave some publicity to the acts he had been ordered to perform, otherwise the moral of the parable would have been lost. It was the people who had to come under conviction of sin, not the prophet. The message of the object lesson is powerful, but only if it was enacted, or at least reported publicly. We do, however, not read that Jeremiah was ordered to do any part of this enactment publicly. There is also no time factor mentioned in this parable. We do not know how long Jeremiah had to wear the loincloth before hiding it, nor what "many days later" (v.6) stands for. The whole enactment must have covered a period of several months for the cloth to be spoiled beyond redemption.

Vv.12-17 describe another warning for the purpose of making Judah aware that she is in danger of reaching the point of no return. God is about to harden the people's heart, making it impossible for them to repent and return to Him. This is done in a parable about wineskins. The Hebrew word *nebel* has a variety of meaning. It usually means "a skin-bag for liquids," but it can also mean "a lyre," because of it having the form of a body. *The New International Version* reads: "Every wineskin should be filled with wine." But *The New King James Version*: "Every bottle shall be filled with wine." *The New Living Translation* reads: "So tell them, 'This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: May all your jars be filled with wine.' And they will reply, 'Of course! Jars are made to be filled with wine!'" The problem with "wineskins" is that smashing them against one another does not have the same disastrous effect as doing it with bottles of jars.

The Pulpit Commentary believes, on the basis of v.13 that it is an earthenware bottle or pitcher, referring to Isaiah, where the same word is used, to prove its point. The verse in Isaiah reads: "It will break in pieces like *pottery*, shattered so mercilessly that among its pieces not a fragment will be found for taking coals from a hearth or scooping water out of a cistern."¹

There is some irony in the way God wants Jeremiah to present His case to the people. Upon the statement that there ought to be wine in every wineskin, the people answer as if they were experts on the point. This highlights the fact that they were regular customers at the liquor store. Having established that fact, God tells them they will turn into that which they consume.

"Every wineskin should be filled with wine" is by some Bible scholars considered to be a proverbial expression. Some scholars believe that the smashing together of the skins or jars is symbolic for a civil war. As *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: "The kingdom of Judah did not indeed fall by civil war; but who can deny that the fury of the various factions in Judah and Jerusalem did really contribute to the fall of the realm? The shattering of the pots does not mean directly civil war; it is given as the result of

1. Isa. 30:14

the drunkenness of the inhabitants, under which they, no longer capable of self-control, dash against and so destroy one another.” But, as the text indicates, the mutual destruction is an act of God. The removal of God’s restraining Spirit allows human sinful nature to destroy itself.

There is also a heartrending note in the words “I will allow no pity or mercy or compassion to keep me from destroying them.” God’s natural reaction would be to show pity and mercy; it takes Him a determined effort, to put it in human terms, to keep pity out of it.

The third warning in vv.15-17 is probably in Jeremiah’s own words. He is the one who will weep bitterly when Judah is taken into captivity. Jeremiah describes Judah as being arrogant, which is characteristic for people who are alcoholic and refuse to admit it. The Bible indicates that there is a connection between alcohol and a person’s spirit. In moderation, it is described as “wine that gladdens the heart of man.”¹ It is also used as a figure of the wrath of God, as in: “In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.”² The Apostle Paul refers to the relationship between “the Spirit” and “spirits” in the statement: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”³ Alcohol loosens the human spirit and the quantity in which it is used determines whether the person who does the loosening loses control or not.

The darkness into which the people of Judah were losing themselves was the darkness of their soul. This is the darkness Jesus speaks about in *The Sermon on the Mount*: “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”⁴

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this section: “The third warning was against pride and arrogance toward God. The glory must belong to Israel’s Creator, not to Baal, and the nation is urged to pay attention to the symbolic lessons previously set out. The people were already like unwary travelers stumbling in the gathering gloom as they tried desperately to reach shelter for the night, and they are urged to return to God before the darkness of catastrophe engulfs them. In Greek thought *hybris*, the sin of pride, tempted the gods to strike the proud person dead. The New Testament listed pride with other vices which proceeded from the inner man (Mk. 7:22) and contrasted it with meekness (Jas. 4:6, citing Pr. 3:34; I Pet. 5:5). For Paul the proud sinner was a typical product of depraved pagan society, a view reflected by Jeremiah.”

In vv.18 and 19 it is obviously again God who speaks, telling Jeremiah to address the king and his mother. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Say to the king and the queen...” The Hebrew word used for “queen” is *gebiyrah*, which is the feminine of *gebiyr*, meaning: “master.” We find the word used for “queen mother” in the verse: “He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley.”⁵ And Jeremiah uses it again in a later chapter: “This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem,”⁶ applying it to Jehoiachin. According to *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* she was “the queen-mother, who, as the king was not more than 18 years old, held the chief power. Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan, carried away captive with Jehoiakim by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:8-15).”

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1. Ps. 104:15
 2. Ps. 75:8
 3. Eph. 5:18
 4. Matt. 6:22,23
 5. I Kings 15:13
 6. Jer. 29:2

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “In bidding these royal personages to descend from their throne, the prophet was rebuking them, as leaders of the people, for the contemptuous response to his message. The Hebrew *Negeb* means ‘dry,’ not ‘south’ (AV), although the Negeb was located south of the Gaza-Beersheba road and merges into the highlands of the Sinai peninsula. The cities of the area would be barricaded to prevent entry by refugees fleeing the fury of the invader. The mention of complete exile (19) is poetic exaggeration, since only the potential leaders and skilled artisans were actually taken to Babylonia. These, however, were representative of the entire nation. The principle of representation underlay the entire Hebrew sacrificial system, and found supreme expression in the work of Christ on the cross (cf. Jn. 11:50-52).”

The fifth warning, vv.20-27, presents some problems, mainly because of the interpretation of “those you cultivated as your special allies” (v.21). The Hebrew reads literally: “For you have taught them not [to be] as chief [and] captains over you.” *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests the term “familiar friends” for “chief captains.” The Hebrew word that causes the problems is *‘alluwph*, which has a variety of meanings, ranging from “familiar,” “a friend,” “gentle,” “a chieftain,” to “a bullock.” David uses the words in one of his psalms: “If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, *my companion*, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God.”¹ We find it in the proverb: “A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates *close friends*.”²

In the context, the warning pertains most likely to the coming Babylonian invasion. But *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* believes differently, stating: “The prophet means the heathen kings, for whose favor Judah had hitherto been intriguing, the Babylonians and Egyptians. There is no cogent reason for referring the words, as many commentators do, to the Babylonians alone. For the statement is quite general throughout; and, on the one hand, Judah had, from the days of Ahaz on, courted the alliance not of the Babylonians alone, but of the Egyptians too (cf. Jer 2:18); and, on the other hand, after the death of Josiah, Judah had become subject to Egypt, and had had to endure the grievous domination of the Pharaohs, as Jeremiah had threatened, 2:16.” The fact that the people are told to direct their eyes to the north, however, suggests the Babylonians, more than Egypt.

The image of a woman in labor is used repeatedly to describe the terror of destruction. Jeremiah uses it frequently.³ Here the pain does not result in the joy of birth, as is the natural result of a normal birthing process. Jesus uses the image in that positive way, saying: “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”⁴ In that sense the believer does not suffer like the unbeliever. The people of Jerusalem had not given God any room in their lives. They ask themselves the question: “Why has this happened to me?”

Vv.22-27 describe in graphic detail and in terms of sexual abuse the consequences of idol worship. God treats idolatry as fornication or adultery. Spiritual fellowship with Him evinces the same kind of intimacy as physical relations between husband and wife. God sees idolatry as spiritual adultery. This idolatrous relationship ends in physical abuse. The Hebrew text puts v.22 more euphemistically: “For the greatness of your iniquity your skirts are discovered [and] your heels made bare.” What lustful men do to a prostitute, God will do here Himself to the people of Judah. He will expose her spiritual nakedness of the soul, as the former would do to the body.

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1. Ps. 55:12-14
 2. Prov. 16:28
 3. See Jer. 4:31, 6:24, 30:6, 48:41.
 4. John 16:21,22

The point that is driven home in v.23 is the fact that we are all sinners by nature. We cannot change ourselves as a black person cannot change the color of his skin or a leopard its spots. The reason this is emphasized is not to say that we are created for sinning, but that only God can change our hearts. Unless we discover our own true nature and come to Him in confession, no change will occur. Ours must be the confession and solution of the Apostle Paul: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!”¹

When we put the last words of this chapter, “Woe to you, O Jerusalem! How long will you be unclean?” next to Jesus’ exclamation: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing”² we can see what God is willing to do about our sinful nature and why nothing happens if we do not surrender to Him.

25. Intercession and response in an emergency 14:1-22

1 This is the word of the Lord to Jeremiah concerning the drought:

2 "Judah mourns, her cities languish; they wail for the land, and a cry goes up from Jerusalem.

3 The nobles send their servants for water; they go to the cisterns but find no water. They return with their jars unfilled; dismayed and despairing, they cover their heads.

4 The ground is cracked because there is no rain in the land; the farmers are dismayed and cover their heads.

5 Even the doe in the field deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass.

6 Wild donkeys stand on the barren heights and pant like jackals; their eyesight fails for lack of pasture."

7 Although our sins testify against us, O Lord, do something for the sake of your name. For our backsliding is great; we have sinned against you.

8 O Hope of Israel, its Savior in times of distress, why are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveler who stays only a night?

9 Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save? You are among us, O Lord, and we bear your name; do not forsake us!

10 This is what the Lord says about this people: "They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet. So the Lord does not accept them; he will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins."

11 Then the Lord said to me, "Do not pray for the well-being of this people.

12 Although they fast, I will not listen to their cry; though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague."

13 But I said, "Ah, Sovereign Lord, the prophets keep telling them, 'You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, I will give you lasting peace in this place.'"

14 Then the Lord said to me, "The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I have not sent them or appointed them or spoken to them. They are prophesying to you false visions, divinations, idolatries and the delusions of their own minds.

15 Therefore, this is what the Lord says about the prophets who are prophesying in my name: I did not send them, yet they are saying, 'No sword or famine will touch this land.' Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine.

16 And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.

1. Rom 7:24,25

2. Matt. 23:37

17 "Speak this word to them: "'Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my virgin daughter — my people — has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow.

18 If I go into the country, I see those slain by the sword; if I go into the city, I see the ravages of famine. Both prophet and priest have gone to a land they know not.' "

19 Have you rejected Judah completely? Do you despise Zion? Why have you afflicted us so that we cannot be healed? We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there is only terror.

20 O Lord, we acknowledge our wickedness and the guilt of our fathers; we have indeed sinned against you.

21 For the sake of your name do not despise us; do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember your covenant with us and do not break it.

22 Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is you, O Lord our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary states: "We have no historic record of any dearth that may fall in with the time of this prophecy, and perhaps it does not refer to any particular dearth: but this was a calamity to which Judea was very liable. They had ordinarily very dry summers, for scarcely any rain fell from April to the middle of October; and during much of this time, the rivers were generally either very low or entirely dry. They kept the rain of the winter in tanks and reservoirs; and if little fell in winter, a dearth was unavoidable." It is hard to image that Jeremiah would refer here to a hypothetical drought, as Clarke suggests. Although no historic record exists, and nothing like the famous drought of Elijah occurred, we must assume that Judah went through an extended and unusual dry season. Most Bible scholars believe that this prophecy dates from the reign of Jehoiakim.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: "Occasional periods of drought occurred in Palestine, and along with famine they formed part of the covenant curses (*cf.* Dt. 28:23f.). The passage describes either a prolonged drought or a succession of short, severe ones, along with their devastating consequences. The calamity had affected the entire land, thus portending complete destruction. People were covering their heads in mourning (*cf.* 2 Sa. 15:30). All cultivation of crops had ceased, and some animals had abandoned their young for lack of fodder. In the face of clear indication of divine displeasure Judah still refused to repent and be rehabilitated, thereby providing a stark illustration of those lost in sin and alienated from the covenant of promise (*cf.* Eph. 2:12). Despite warning from God to the contrary, Jeremiah is so overcome by anguish for his people that he prays for their deliverance."

The Matthew Henry's Commentary calls this chapter "The language of nature lamenting the calamity." *The Commentary* states: "When the heavens were as brass, and distilled no dews, the earth was as iron, and produced no fruits; and then the grief and confusion were universal. The people of the land were all in tears. Destroy their vines and their fig trees and you cause all their mirth to cease, Hos 2:11,12. All their joy fails with the joy of harvest, with that of their corn and wine. Judah mourns (v. 2), not for the sin, but for the trouble—for the withholding of the rain, not for the withdrawing of God's favor."

As I am writing these notes, the state of Georgia is experiencing the most severe drought in the recorded history of the state. The governor called for a prayer meeting which took place on the steps of the Capitol in Atlanta, in the face of derision by some atheists. As Matthew Henry observes about Judah, Atlanta did mourn "not for the sin, but for the trouble—for the withholding of the rain, not for the withdrawing of God's favor."

This chapter is presented as "the word of the Lord to Jeremiah concerning the drought," which makes us understand that the description of the consequences of the drought upon the nation in vv.1-6 is what God says about it. Vv.7-9 are obviously Jeremiah's words and v.10 is God's answer to his prayer. Vv.11-18 constitute a dialogue between God and Jeremiah, in which God tells Jeremiah to stop his prayer of intercession, an order Jeremiah disregards (!) because in vv. 19-22 Jeremiah continues his prayer. We could

call Jeremiah's attitude in this an example of inspired disobedience. And I believe that in this instance God was pleased with his insubordination.

Judah, the cities and the land are poetically personalized in v.2 as being in mourning about the consequences of the sins of the people. The same kind of poetry in connection with Israel's sin is used in the earlier warning: "Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out."¹ There is an almost animistic tone in this kind of language, but we must not draw the wrong consequences from this. There exists a clear link between the soil of this earth and the human beings it supports. When God created man we read: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."² And when man fell into sin, the dust of the ground is mentioned again. "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."³ Maybe we could say that it is the dust within us, the very atoms and molecules of which we are made that rebels when we cut ourselves off from the life-giving fellowship with God.

Vv.3 and 4 describe the reaction of the city dwellers from high to low. Jeremiah uses two Hebrew rhyming words that add to the poetry of the verses. *'Addiyar*, "nobles," means "powerful," and *tsa'iyar*, "servants," means "little," or "low." The drought affects all from high to low from the city to the farmland. The farmers are, of course, the most affected. They cover their head as a sign of mourning because drought means death to them and their livestock.

The text says both about the servants and the farmers looking for water that they "are dismayed and cover their heads." About the servants it is also said that they are "despairing." The Hebrew word used is *kalam*, which means literally "to be wounded," or "insulted." We find it first used in the story of Miriam's leprosy: "The Lord replied to Moses, 'If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in *disgrace* for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back.'"⁴ The drought was the result of human sin, but our sin is an insult to the image of God in us. Sin damages our human dignity.

The reaction of the animal world, the doe and the wild donkey, illustrates Paul's statement: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."⁵

In his prayer of intercession, Jeremiah penetrates to the core of the matter. Mankind is steeped in sin and God is holy and never the twain will meet. But there is the matter of the Name of God, which provides the solution. Like Moses, Jeremiah tells God that He has a reputation to uphold. When Israel had made the gold calf, Moses went to intercede for the people. He told them later: "I lay prostrate before the Lord those forty days and forty nights because the Lord had said he would destroy you. I prayed to the Lord and said, 'O Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin. Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, 'Because the Lord was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the desert.' 'But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.'"⁶

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: "The prophet knows that confession will result in forgiveness (*cf.* I Jn. 1:9), and if the nation will not acknowledge its sin, Jeremiah will do so

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1. Lev. 20:22
 2. Gen. 2:7
 3. Gen. 3:19
 4. Num. 12:14
 5. Rom. 8:22
 6. Deut. 9:25-29

vicariously. Whereas the prophet thinks of God as a traveler who has no interest in the inhabitants of the land through which he is passing, God replies by insisting upon His covenantal rights.”

Referring to the Name of God, Jeremiah calls Him: “Hope of Israel,” “Savior in times of distress.” Jeremiah also speaks to God as “a stranger in the land,” “a traveler who stays only a night.” Yet, God had said that He intended to dwell among the people. We read that God said to Moses: “I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the Lord their God.”¹ The reference to the altar and the priests speaks of the means of atonement and forgiveness of sin.

Jeremiah points out to God the inconsistency of His being the “Hope of Israel,” of being the one after whom the nation is named and who is not living up to His reputation. The very name Israel means: “He struggled with God.” When Jacob encountered the angel of the Lord at Peniel, we read: “The man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome.’”² The relationship between God and His people cannot be denied. Yet, God behaved in His own country like a foreigner, like someone who is on his way to another place and checks into a motel for one night. The Hebrew word used is *ger*, meaning “a guest,” or “a foreigner.” We find it in God’s prophecy to Abraham about Israel’s stay in Egypt. “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be *strangers* in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.’”³ “Traveler” is the translation of the Hebrew *‘iysh ‘arach*. This is the only place in Scripture where these words are used. “A man taken by surprise” is the rendering of the Hebrew *daham*, meaning literally: “dumbfounded.” As if the Omniscient could be surprised by what happens! The warrior is *gibbowr*, a word that is used in Genesis to describe the giants, the pre-flood “Nephilim.”⁴ As if the Almighty could be an impotent hero! In all this Jeremiah makes a powerful plea for God to come and intervene in the condition of Israel. His prayer was a prayer for revival.

When the Word became flesh, the same condition prevailed in Israel of the first century. The Messiah was treated as a stranger, not as the One after whom the nation took its name. We read: “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”⁵ When God is treated as a stranger, it is not God’s fault.

In v.10 God reverses the roles. He had been accused of being a wanderer, someone who comes for one night and then goes on. Israel is the one who walks away from Him. They are the wanderers. The Hebrew word *nuwa`* has the meaning of “to waver.” They are what the Apostle James calls, “the doubters.” “He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”⁶ “They do not restrain their feet” means that they love to walk away from God towards their idols.

Then God tells Jeremiah to stop his prayer of intercession. God had said the same to Samuel about his prayers for Saul,⁷ and to Jeremiah before: “So do not pray for this people nor offer any plea or petition for them; do not plead with me, for I will not listen to you.”⁸ But this had not kept Jeremiah from praying.

The reason for God’s rejection of Jeremiah’s prayers and Judah’s sacrifices and fasts is that the people had not demonstrated a change of heart. The sacrifices mentioned are not the ones prescribed for the

1. Ex. 29:44-46
2. Gen. 32:28
3. Gen. 15:13
4. See Gen. 6:4.
5. John 1:10,11
6. James 1:6
7. See I Sam. 16:1.
8. Jer. 7:16

atonement of sin, which would have been a sin offering and a guilt offering.¹ The burnt offering and grain offering were rituals of praise which could only be brought by those who had received forgiveness. The people went through the rituals, but they made them into empty and meaningless rites. God's reply to this kind of observance is "the sword, famine and plague" (v.12). R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: "Sword ... famine ... disease is a combination which occurs seven times in the extant prophecy."

Jeremiah counters this by saying that the ones to blame are the prophets who claim to speak for the Lord and promise a bright future. On this point Harrison observes: "Jeremiah makes an unsuccessful attempt to explain the shortcomings of his deluded compatriots, but God in reply castigates the authors of the mischief, the false prophets, and dismissed their utterances as *lying visions, valueless divinations and self-deceptions* (14). Such deceivers will be the first to suffer, followed by the people as a whole, who had been reveling in the deception. To lie unburied was one of the most terrible fates which could overtake a person. False prophets are promised at the close of the Christian dispensation (Mt. 24:11; Mk. 13:22)."

The implication of God's Word to Jeremiah here is that those who believe false prophets are held responsible for their errors. God expects us to be able to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and evil spirits. Jesus indicates that the gift of discernment is given to those who choose to obey the will of God. He said to the people of His day: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him."² Judah's acceptance of the message of the false prophets fit in with their refusal to obey the will of God. God's judgment is called "the calamity they deserve."

The amazing feature of vv.17 and 18 is that the tears shed are not Jeremiah's but God's. *The Pulpit Commentary*, believing that there is an error in the transcript of the manuscript, states: "There is something strange and contrary to verisimilitude in the prefixing of this formula, not to a Divine revelation, but to a mere expression of the pained human feelings of the prophet. It is possible that the editor of Jeremiah's prophecies thought the paragraph which begins here needed something to link it with the preceding passage, and selected his formula rather unsuitably." The use of the title "my virgin daughter" is, however, an indication that God is speaking. Jeremiah could hardly speak of his contemporaries in terms like this. That does not mean that the tears are not Jeremiah's, but they are also an expression of God's deep sorrow over His people. God orders Jeremiah to weep so the people will come to understand the sad reality of their condition. As the *Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states: "If not his words, then surely his tears; for the terrible calamity he has to announce must touch and stagger them, so that they may be persuaded to examine themselves and consider what it is that tends to their peace." In this Jeremiah anticipates the sorrow of Jesus, of whom we read: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes.'"³ God weeps over human sin in His Son. This gives a deeper meaning to the expression "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering."⁴

The prophet and priest are singled out as going into captivity. This is obviously meant symbolically in that they represent the channels of God's revelation to the people. Together with the destruction of the temple they reflect the idea that God is no longer in the midst of His people. It speaks more about the effects of the captivity than about the physical aspect of people being force to move to another country.

Bible scholars have been puzzled by the use of the Hebrew word *cachar*, translated "have gone." It usually refers to a merchant peddling his merchandise. We find it in the verse that describes Abraham's

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1. See Lev. 5 and 6.
 2. John 7:16-18
 3. Luke 19:41,42
 4. Isa. 53:3

negotiations in the purchase of a burial place for Sarah. “Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms and weighed out for him the price he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weight current among the *merchants*.”¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The verb used here can obviously not have its ordinary sense of going about for purposes of traffic. Aramaic usage suggests, however, a suitable meaning; what the prophet sketches before us is a company of these ex-grandees ‘begging their way’ into an unknown land.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “The last clause of verse 18 is obscure, but may mean *they wandered off to a land with which they were unfamiliar*.”

Vv.19-22 are, obviously, Jeremiah’s own words and prayer of intercession for his people. The rejection and affliction are symbolized in the persisting drought, as is clear from v.22. Jeremiah uses several powerful words to describe God’s attitude toward Judah. The word “rejected” is the translation of the Hebrew *ma’ac*, which has the meaning of “loathing.” The same Hebrew word is in Leviticus, which also gives the answer to Jeremiah’s question: “But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, and if you *reject* my decrees and *abhor* my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it.”² God’s rejection of Judah is the result of Judah’s rejection of God. “Despise” is *ga’al* in Hebrew. It is synonymous with “reject,” and it is also found in the above quotation in Leviticus.

Looking at the condition of the land and the people, Jeremiah concludes that both are condemned to death. Jeremiah saw Judah as Ezekiel would see her later in his vision of the valley with dead bones. But that which filled Ezekiel with hope was despair for Jeremiah. We read Ezekiel’s vision: “He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ I said, ‘O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.’ Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.’” So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, ‘Prophecy to the breath; prophecy, son of man, and say to it, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.’ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet — a vast army. Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophecy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”³

This vision of resurrection was withheld from Jeremiah. For him, death was the end of the nation at this point. Hope itself had died.

Jeremiah’s problem, which is the problem of every person living in the confinements of time and space, is that he only saw a fragment of God’s eternal plan of salvation. He saw only the death part of it, whilst Ezekiel saw the resurrection. If death were the end, there would indeed be no hope. Although death appears to us as the end, for God it is the gateway to life. God uses death as a means of salvation. When a

1. Gen. 23:16
2. Lev. 26:14-16
3. Ezek. 37:2-14

cancer patient dies, his cancer dies with him. When we die, our sin dies with us, but when we are raised from the dead, our sinful nature will not come back to life with us.

Jeremiah could not see the upcoming captivity as a means of healing. How could the destruction of the temple, the place of God's revelation on earth, be curative? How could Jesus' death on the cross be the way of salvation? God never takes a step back, even if He uproots and kills.

Jeremiah prays here the same kind of prayer Daniel would pray at the end of the captivity, confessing the sins of the present and the past generations. Daniel prayed: "O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. O Lord, we and our kings, our princes and our fathers are covered with shame because we have sinned against you."¹ If God had answered Jeremiah's prayer, Judah would never have been healed from its idolatry.

The Matthew Henry's Commentary comments on Jeremiah's prayer: "Good men lay the credit of religion, and its profession in the world, nearer their hearts than any private interest or concern of their own; and those are powerful pleas in prayer which are fetched thence and great supports to faith. We may be sure that God will not disgrace the throne of his glory on earth; nor will he eclipse the glory of his throne by one providence without soon making it shine forth, and more brightly than before, by another. God will be no loser in his honor at the long run. To the promise of God; of this they are humbly bold to put him in mind: Remember thy covenant with us, and break not that covenant. Not that they had any distrust of his fidelity, or that they thought he needed to be put in mind of his promise to them, but what he had said he would plead with himself they take the liberty to plead with him. Then will I remember my covenant, Lev. 26:42."

We must bear in mind at this point that Jeremiah does not pray for the removal of the upcoming captivity; he prays for rain. In that sense, his prayer resembles the prayer of Elijah. But the drought in the days of Elijah had come in answer to Elijah's prayer and it ended in answer to it. James informs us that: "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops."² Elijah's prayer, however, was more dramatic and confrontational. We read: "At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: 'O Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, O Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.'"³ At that point God answered, not with rain but with fire that consumed Elijah's sacrifice. When Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, bent down to the ground and put his face between his knees, he had to pray seven times before "a cloud as small as a man's hand is rising from the sea" announced the coming rainstorm.⁴ The rain came, but the hearts of the people were not turned back to the Lord; they refused to repent and the Northern Kingdom was wiped off the face of the earth about 130 years later.

Jeremiah's plea sounds quite different from Elijah's but it was actually more successful. In spite of the apparent negative response, Judah's captivity turned out to be for a limited period of time. A remnant did return after 70 years of deportation. And Jeremiah's prayer must have played a major role in this outcome. Elijah's prayer was definitely more dramatic; Jeremiah's prayer ultimately won the day. *Halley's Handbook* observes about Jeremiah's prayer here: "His intercession to God is as near an approach to the spirit of Christ as is to be found anywhere in the Old Testament."

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1. Dan. 9:4-6, 8
 2. James 5:17,18
 3. I Kings 18:36,37
 4. See I Kings 18:42-45.

26. The final answer 15:1-9

1 Then the Lord said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!"

2 And if they ask you, "Where shall we go?" tell them, "This is what the Lord says: "'Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.'

3 "I will send four kinds of destroyers against them," declares the Lord, "the sword to kill and the dogs to drag away and the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth to devour and destroy.

4 I will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem.

5 "Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Who will mourn for you? Who will stop to ask how you are?

6 You have rejected me," declares the Lord. "You keep on backsliding. So I will lay hands on you and destroy you; I can no longer show compassion.

7 I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the city gates of the land. I will bring bereavement and destruction on my people, for they have not changed their ways.

8 I will make their widows more numerous than the sand of the sea. At midday I will bring a destroyer against the mothers of their young men; suddenly I will bring down on them anguish and terror.

9 The mother of seven will grow faint and breathe her last. Her sun will set while it is still day; she will be disgraced and humiliated. I will put the survivors to the sword before their enemies," declares the Lord.

This chapter is a continuation of the previous one. The drought is still going on and God tells Jeremiah that He will not listen to his prayers of intercession. Judah's spiritual condition was the fruit of the apostasy that dated from the reign of Manasseh (697-642 BC). If we date Jeremiah's prophecy here during the reign of Jehoiakim or Jehoiachin (597 BC), Manasseh's son survived him by 45 years or more. Josiah's reforms had not affected the heart of the nation.

The examples of Moses' and Samuel's intercession refer to Israel's sin with the gold calf, at which time Moses prayed, and Israel's renewal of the covenant with God at Mizpah, when Samuel interceded during a Philistine attack. We read: "But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. 'O Lord,' he said, 'why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, "It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth"? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people."¹ And: "When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, 'Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.' Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him. While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites."²

The inference is that some people have the gift of intercession. Although the Apostle Paul does not mention intercessory prayer as one of the gifts of the Spirit, we may assume that it is in the same category as the gift of healing. Why God pays more attention to the prayers of some people, more than those of others, is probably related to the measure of intimacy they have with the Lord. And closeness with God is the result of

1. Ex. 32:11,12

2. I Sam. 7:7-10

obedience. Whether we all can cultivate our prayer life to the point where God always hears us, is a question we all must answer privately.

In this instance, God tells Jeremiah that even famous intercessors would not be able to change His mind about Israel. When Moses prayed, the people must have had some measure of conviction of sin. When Samuel prayed the people had already pledged obedience in the renewal of the covenant. In the days of Jeremiah, Judah had reached the point of no return. Yet, as we saw above, it was ultimately Jeremiah's prayer that set a limit of 70 years to the Babylonian captivity.

We must also remember that when God announces judgment to come, it is always an act of grace. The purpose of the declaration of judgment is to wake up people to the reality of their sinful condition and give them the opportunity to repent. In later chapters, Jeremiah confirms God's intent. We read: "If that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned."¹ And: "I have heard Israel saying, 'You disciplined me severely, like a calf that needs training for the yoke. Turn me again to you and restore me, for you alone are the Lord my God.'"² Conviction of sin is the work of the Holy Spirit and God is more than willing to work conviction within us if we allow Him to do so.

V.2 describes in graphic language what lies ahead for Judah if they disregard God's warning: death, starvation and captivity are waiting at the end of the road. V.3 describes disgrace in that those who die will not even be given the honor of burial. Their bodies will be left for the dogs and vultures to tear apart and consume. Death by itself is enough of an insult to human dignity. The fact that we are dust and will return to dust symbolizes the immense damage caused by sin to God's glory in man He created. To become the prey of vultures adds insult to injury.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on "because of what Manasseh son of Hezekiah king of Judah did in Jerusalem," stating: "He was now dead, but the effects of his sins still remained. How much evil one bad man can cause! The evil fruits remain even after he himself has received repentance and forgiveness. The people had followed his wicked example ever since; and it is implied that it was only through the long-suffering of God that the penal consequences had been suspended up to the present time (cf. the case of 'Jeroboam, who did sin, and who made Israel to sin,' 1 Kings 14:16.)"

God describes the punishment as "I will winnow them with a winnowing fork at the city gates of the land." There is yet an element of hope in this wording. The purpose of winnowing is to separate the chaff from the grain. Jesus used a similar expression when He warned Peter of his upcoming denial, saying: "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."³ In Peter's case, Satan's intent was not to get grain, but to prove that chaff was all there was left. Jesus allowed the process in Peter's life to get rid of the hull and keep the kernel. But for human beings to experience the winnowing fork amounts to intense suffering. It means being tossed and thrown up and then fall down.

It was the grain that would be taken to Babylon; the chaff would be left in ruined cities and scorched earth.

Vv.8 and 9 concentrate on the distaff section of the population. The widow is the wife who loses her husband, the mother her sons. The untimely sunset in the life of the woman speaks of the spiritual darkness and emotional night that will come over her. The light of her life will be gone. To single out a woman in this scene of suffering intensifies the pain of the picture. There will be no survivors, physically and emotionally.

27. Lament and reply 15:10-21

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1. Jer. 18:8
 2. Jer. 31:18 (*New Living Translation*)
 3. Luke 22:31,32

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

11 *The Lord said, "Surely I will deliver you for a good purpose; surely I will make your enemies plead with you in times of disaster and times of distress.*

12 *"Can a man break iron — iron from the north — or bronze?*

13 *Your wealth and your treasures I will give as plunder, without charge, because of all your sins throughout your country.*

14 *I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for my anger will kindle a fire that will burn against you."*

15 *You understand, O Lord; remember me and care for me. Avenge me on my persecutors. You are long-suffering — do not take me away; think of how I suffer reproach for your sake.*

16 *When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.*

17 *I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me and you had filled me with indignation.*

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

19 *Therefore this is what the Lord says: "If you repent, I will restore you that you may serve me; if you utter worthy, not worthless, words, you will be my spokesman. Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.*

20 *I will make you a wall to this people, a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you to rescue and save you," declares the Lord.*

21 *"I will save you from the hands of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the cruel."*

V.10 describes Jeremiah's personal pain as a result of his prophetic ministry. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this verse and the following: "This confessional section furnishes a glimpse of the prophet's innermost being. He is alienated from his people because of his witness, yet he has no choice but to proclaim God's word to a recalcitrant nation. He is a lonely, anxious man, yet one who rejoices that God dwells in his heart. In a burst of powerful emotion the prophet broods over his lot in life and wishes that he had never been born, complaining that, though he has lived an upright life, everyone curses him. This was hardly surprising in view of his bitter attacks on his countrymen. However, in the future when calamity strikes, his erstwhile opponents will hurry to him, asking for intercession on their behalf." Jeremiah must have felt akin to Job, who cursed the day of his birth.¹

V.11 has caused Bible scholars a great deal of trouble. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the introductory phrase "The Lord said": "The prophets are usually so tenacious of the same formulae that even their slight deviations are noteworthy. 'The Lord said,' for 'Thus saith the Lord,' occurs only here and in ... Jeremiah 46:25 (where, however, the phrase has possibly been detached by mistake from the preceding verse)." The Commentary suggests that this whole section from vv.10-21 does not belong at this place, but should or could be placed in the context of chapter 40. We read: "These verses come in very unexpectedly, and are certainly not to be regarded as a continuation of the preceding discourse. They describe some deeply pathetic moment of the prophet's inner life, and in all probability belong to a later period of the history of Judah. At any rate, the appreciation of the next chapter will be facilitated by reading it in close connection with Ver. 9 of the present chapter. But the section before us is too impressive to be cast adrift without an attempt to find a place for it in the life of the prophet. We are told in ... Jeremiah 40:4, 5, that Jeremiah had the choice given him of either going to Babylon with the exiles, or dwelling with the Jews who were allowed to remain under Gedaliah the governor. He chose, as the narrative in Jeremiah 40. tells us, to stay with Gedaliah; but the narrative could not, in accordance with the reserve which characterizes the inspired

1. Job 3:1 ff.

writers, reveal the state of mind in which this difficult choice was made. This omission is supplied in the paragraph before us. Jeremiah, with that lyric tendency peculiar to him among the prophets, gives a vent to his emotion in these impassioned verses. He tells his friends that the resolution to go to Gedaliah may cost him a severe struggle. He longs for rest, and in Babylon he would have more chance of a quiet life than among the turbulent Jews at home. But he has looked up to God for guidance, and, however painful to the flesh, God's will must be obeyed. He gives us the substance of the revelation which he received. The Divine counselor points out that he has already interposed in the most striking manner for Jeremiah, and declares that if he will devote himself to the Jews under Gedaliah, a new and fruitful field will be open to him, in which, moreover, by Divine appointment, no harm can happen to him. Whether this is really the background of the paragraph must remain uncertain. In a case of this kind, we are obliged to call in the help of the imagination, if the words of the prophet are to be realized with any degree of vividness. There are some great difficulties in the text, and apparently one interpolation (Vers. 13, 14 being in all probability an incorrect copy of ... Jeremiah 17:3, 4)."

The Hebrew text of v.11 reads literally: "The Lord said, truly it shall be well [with] your remnant; truly I will cause the enemy to entreat you [well] in the time of evil and in the time of affliction." The Hebrew word rendered here "remnant" is *sharah*, which literally means: "to free." The word is only found in this verse in all of Scripture, which makes it difficult to define for lack of comparison. The following different translations highlight the problem. *The New King James Version* reads: "Surely it will be well with your remnant; surely I will cause the enemy to intercede with you in the time of adversity and in the time of affliction." *The New Living Translation*: "I will take care of you, Jeremiah. Your enemies will ask you to plead on their behalf in times of trouble and distress." *The Living Bible* seems to take a wild guess at the meaning, linking it to v.10 and reading: "Then Jeremiah said, 'What sadness is mine, my mother; oh, that I had died at birth. For I am hated everywhere I go. I am neither a creditor soon to foreclose nor a debtor refusing to pay-yet they all curse me. Well, let them curse! Lord, you know how I have pled with you on their behalf-how I have begged you to spare these enemies of mine.' "

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary states: "The meaning of the verse can only be this: As little as a man can break iron, will the Jewish people be able to break the hostile power of the north (Jer 13:20). Taken thus, the pictorial style of the verse contains a suggestion that the adversaries of the prophet will, by the crushing power of the Chaldeans, be reduced to the condition of turning themselves in supplication to the prophet."

The Hebrew text of v.12 reads literally: "Shall iron break iron [the] northern and the steel?" Bible scholars have argued extensively about the meaning of these words. Who is speaking and to whom and what is the sense? Some suggests that God says here to Jeremiah that the people have hardened themselves to the point where nothing can be done about it. Others suggest that "As little as a man can break iron, will the Jewish people be able to break the hostile power of the north (Jer 13:20)." It seems more logical that God reminds Jeremiah here of His promise when He called Jeremiah to become a prophet and assured him of His divine protection, saying: "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you."¹

There can be little doubt about vv.13 and 14. Obviously God speaks here to the people, saying that they will lose all their possessions and that they will face the fire of His anger. Moses had warned the Israelites against the dangers of idolatry, saying: "Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you; do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."² The author of Hebrew borrows this

1. Jer. 1:17-19
2. Deut. 4:23,24

language also: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our ‘God is a consuming fire.’ ”¹

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about vv.15-21: “In a poetic passage of great beauty Jeremiah expresses his sense of utter loneliness in the midst of a bustling people. Many of his emotional tensions arose from an inner compulsion to side with God against his compatriots. Every true servant of God is likely to experience tensions of this kind, especially if, like Jeremiah, his foes are his relatives (cf. Mt. 10:36). The degree of individual sensitivity will govern the amount of suffering involved in the choice between the world and God (cf. Jas. 4:4). When God’s word came to Jeremiah he welcomed it avidly (cf. Ezk. 2:8 – 3:3), but this also fostered his isolation. He was set apart from his fellows by the indwelling prophetic spirit, and cut off from popular activities because of his indignation over national sin. In his grief Jeremiah refuses to believe that God is an unreliable stream (wadi, 18). Which cannot be counted on for water in the heat of summer because of his affirmation in 2:13. God’s response restates the basic principle that obedience and true repentance will guarantee forgiveness and blessing. Jeremiah will again stand before Him in divine service (cf. 1 Ki. 1:2; 10:8) if he sifts the valuable from the worthless, thereby removing the dross of idolatry and apostasy. The description *mouth*, i.e. spokesman, recalls the designation (perhaps an Egyptian official title) of Aaron in Exodus 4:16. As such Jeremiah has to bring the people up to his own spiritual level, in the assurance that God will deliver him (cf. 1:8,18f).”

We saw earlier that Jeremiah wanted God to pay back to his adversaries what they did to him. We read: “But, O Lord Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.”² It strikes us as strange and “unchristian” to pray for revenge. According to *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, Jeremiah prays here “That [God] would appear for him against those that did him wrong: Revenge me of my persecutors, or rather, Vindicate me from my persecutors; give judgment against them, and let that judgment be executed so far as is necessary for my vindication and to compel them to acknowledge that they have done me wrong. Further than this a good man will not desire that God should avenge him. Let something be done to convince the world that (whatever blasphemers say to the contrary) Jeremiah is a righteous man and the God whom he serves is a righteous God.”

Jeremiah understood that the reproach he suffered was for the Lord’s sake. It was because he identified with God’s cause that he asked God to identify with His. In insulting Jeremiah, the people insulted the glory of God. Jesus may have had Jeremiah in mind when, in *The Sermon on the Mount*, He said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”³

There is complete surrender to the will of God and to His cause in Jeremiah’s prayer. He understood, though, that his preaching has endangered his life. There may have been an element of fear which lends great depth to his prayer of deliverance.

We do not read how God communicated with Jeremiah. God testified about Moses: “When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.”⁴ Whether Jeremiah enjoyed this kind of intimacy with the Lord, we are not told.

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1. Heb. 12:28,29
 2. Jer. 11:20
 3. Matt. 5:10-12
 4. Num. 12:6-8

The Word of God, mentioned in v.16 is, obviously, not the written Word we read. Jeremiah was one of the authors of the written Word, not one of the readers. But the Word of God, in whatever way it came to him, audibly or by inner transmission, became a source of intense joy for him. Like Moses, who had told the Israelites “that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord,” he compared it to food, “soul food.”

When God speaks to a person, it changes him profoundly. As Jesus says: “he called them ‘gods,’ to whom the word of God came.”¹ Jeremiah must have understood that when God spoke to him, He communicated some of His character to him. What we eat turns into us. For Jeremiah it was a name-changing experience, as it will be for us when God writes His Name on our heads.²

Yet, or rather because of his fellowship with God, Jeremiah experienced an unbearable tension in his daily life, living among people who had removed God from their lives. Jeremiah felt like the prodigal among the pigs. This tension was like a physical ailment. The Word of God was his food and drink, but now it seemed as if the source and its brook is drying up, leaving him, like David “in a dry and weary land.” Like David, he could say: “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”³

The problem in v.19 is to whom these words are addressed. The context requires that they apply to Jeremiah. Unless we believe that this verse somehow found its place in the wrong context, which some Bible scholars assume, we must accept the fact that God chastises Jeremiah for his negative thoughts.

The Hebrew text reads literally: “Therefore thus says the Lord, ‘if you return then I will bring you again and you will stand before me: and if you take forth the precious from the vile, you shall be as my mouth: let them return unto you: but you not return unto them.’ ” *The New Living Translation* renders this: “This is how the Lord responds: ‘If you return to me, I will restore you so you can continue to serve me. If you speak good words rather than worthless ones, you will be my spokesman. You must influence them; do not let them influence you!’ ” The Hebrew word, rendered “vile” is *zalal*, which has the connotation of being shaken by the wind, or being morally loose. We find it in the verse in which parents accuse their son. “They shall say to the elders, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a *profligate* and a drunkard.’ ”⁴ Jeremiah uses it only in this verse and in *Lamentations*: “Look, O Lord, and consider, for I am *despised*.”⁵

In spite of the fact that Jeremiah mentioned the Word of God as the basis of his life, he had been infected by the spirit of his generation. God rebukes him for letting himself go in self-pity. Jeremiah is invited to come back and see the right perspective in the presence of the Lord. Asaph’s words can be applied to Jeremiah’s condition: “If I had said, I will speak thus,’ I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.”⁶

It seems shocking to us that God shows Himself to be so insensitive to Jeremiah’s emotional turmoil. Jesus demonstrated the same insensitivity to His disciples’ unbelief. When they woke Him up while He was asleep in their boat and cried: “ ‘Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!’ He replied, ‘You of little faith, why are you so afraid?’ ”⁷ As if they could have calmed the storm and the waves themselves! When He visited His hometown of Nazareth, we read: “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on

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1. John 10:35
 2. See Rev. 22:4.
 3. Ps. 63:1
 4. Deut. 21:20
 5. Lam. 1:11
 6. Ps. 73:15-17,21,22
 7. Matt. 8:25-26

a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith.”¹ In the same way did God show very little patience with Jeremiah’s depression, telling him to repent.

God simply reminds Jeremiah of the promise of protection He had given him when He called him to the prophetic ministry: “ ‘Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord.”² The very fact that Jeremiah had been given this promise could have made him understand what kind of resistance he would encounter.

28. The special conditions of Jeremiah’s life 16:1-13

1 Then the word of the Lord came to me:

2 "You must not marry and have sons or daughters in this place."

3 For this is what the Lord says about the sons and daughters born in this land and about the women who are their mothers and the men who are their fathers:

4 "They will die of deadly diseases. They will not be mourned or buried but will be like refuse lying on the ground. They will perish by sword and famine, and their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth."

5 For this is what the Lord says: "Do not enter a house where there is a funeral meal; do not go to mourn or show sympathy, because I have withdrawn my blessing, my love and my pity from this people," declares the Lord.

6 "Both high and low will die in this land. They will not be buried or mourned, and no one will cut himself or shave his head for them.

7 No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn for the dead — not even for a father or a mother — nor will anyone give them a drink to console them.

8 "And do not enter a house where there is feasting and sit down to eat and drink.

9 For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place.

10 "When you tell these people all this and they ask you, ‘Why has the Lord decreed such a great disaster against us? What wrong have we done? What sin have we committed against the Lord our God?’

11 then say to them, ‘It is because your fathers forsook me,’ declares the Lord, ‘and followed other gods and served and worshiped them. They forsook me and did not keep my law.

12 But you have behaved more wickedly than your fathers. See how each of you is following the stubbornness of his evil heart instead of obeying me.

13 So I will throw you out of this land into a land neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes about Jeremiah’s celibacy: “The prophet was forbidden the comfort and fellowship of marriage as yet another warning to the populace concerning future desolation. Since marriage was the normal state of life for a healthy adult Hebrew male, abstinence for the reasons given would furnish a powerful object-lesson commending abstinence (cf. Mt. 24:19; I Cor. 7:26).”

The above reference to Paul’s observations about marriage in First Corinthians is rather pertinent. We read: “Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are. Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I

1. Mark 6:5,6
2. Jer. 1:18,19

want to spare you this. So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does even better.”¹ Paul’s advice was not, as some people think, a prudish caution against marriage; it was given against the background of a severe persecution of Christians during the reign of Nero. The situation reminds me of the testimony I once read by a young pregnant Jewish woman who knew she would be taken to a Nazi concentration camp where she would be exterminated with the other members of her race. She gave away the baby carriage she had bought for her coming baby, knowing she would never be able to use it.

God wanted to impress upon Jeremiah’s mind how horrible the conditions would be once the Babylonians invaded Judah and He wanted to spare the prophet the additional personal pain of seeing his wife and children murdered and mutilated.

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary observes: “The prophet is here for a sign to the people. They would not regard what he said; let it be tried whether they will regard what he does. In general, he must conduct himself so, in every thing, as became one that expected to see his country in ruins very shortly. This he foretold, but few regarded the prediction; therefore he is to show that he is himself fully satisfied in the truth of it. Others go on in their usual course, but he, in the prospect of these sad times, is forbidden and therefore forbears marriage, mourning for the dead, and mirth. Note, Those that would convince others of and affect them with the word of God must make it appear, even in the most self-denying instances, that they do believe it themselves and are affected with it. If we would rouse others out of their security, and persuade them to sit loose to the world, we must ourselves be mortified to present things and show that we expect the dissolution of them.”

The people of Judah, not only continued in their sin of idolatry, they also completely ignored the consequences of their sin. They were not inclined to take the proclamation of judgment seriously to the point of making any changes in their lifestyle. Jesus predicted that it would be the same, the world over at the time of the Second Coming: “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.”² That was the reason Jeremiah must provide this object lesson to them. His contemporaries would observe that he was not married and made no effort to find a wife for himself. They would ask questions and Jeremiah would give them the answer God had provided for them. Jeremiah’s life would be an illustration of his words. He practiced what he preached.

As another object lesson, Jeremiah was not allowed to participate in the Jewish mourning ceremonies when someone died in his neighborhood. This would be marked as highly irregular. The Hebrew word for “mourning,” *marzeach* is only found in this place in all of the Old Testament. “Lament,” the other word used in v.5 is *caphad*, which consisted in a more demonstrative tearing the hair and beating the breasts, accompanied by wailing.

Ezekiel would later be given a similar command to be an object lesson to the people who had been taken with him into Babylonian captivity. This was when the judgment Jeremiah had proclaimed was about to fall upon Jerusalem. For Ezekiel it was even more personal and painful because he was married and the one he was forbidden to mourn was his own wife. We read: “The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Son of man, with one blow I am about to take away from you the delight of your eyes. Yet do not lament or weep or shed any tears. Groan quietly; do not mourn for the dead. Keep your turban fastened and your sandals on your feet; do not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food [of mourners].’ So I spoke to the people in the morning, and in the evening my wife died. The next morning I did as I had been commanded. Then the people asked me, ‘Won’t you tell us what these things have to do with us?’ So I said to them, ‘The word of the Lord came to me: Say to the house of Israel, ‘ ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am about to desecrate my sanctuary — the stronghold in which you take pride, the delight of your eyes, the object of your affection. The sons and daughters you left behind will fall by the sword. And you will do as I have

1. I Cor. 7:26-28, 38
2. Matt. 24:37-39

done. You will not cover the lower part of your face or eat the customary food [of mourners]. You will keep your turbans on your heads and your sandals on your feet. You will not mourn or weep but will waste away because of your sins and groan among yourselves. Ezekiel will be a sign to you; you will do just as he has done. When this happens, you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.’ ‘”¹

The principle of the second object lesson of vv.8 and 9 is the same, although the content is the opposite of the first one. Jeremiah is neither allowed to weep or to laugh with his people. Grief will be too great for any form of emotional expression. It reflects God’s grief which goes beyond anything man can experience or express.

As an expression of joy Jeremiah uses frequently the phrase “the voices of the bride and bridegroom.”² Speaking about the destruction of Babylon, the emblem of worldly corruption, the Apostle John uses the same expression in the Revelation.³ The voices of a newly married couple who experience the joy of a fresh and complete union is seen as a symbol of ultimate joy, a figure of man’s ultimate union with God. The absence of this joy is death in its totality.

In vv.10-13 God anticipates the people’s reaction to Jeremiah’s object lesson. They will ask Jeremiah what they did to merit this kind of punishment. Their idolatry has seared their conscience to any awareness of sin. Conviction of sin only comes out in the presence of the Lord. It was when Isaiah saw the Lord that he cried out: “Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.”⁴ The Holy Spirit convicts of sin.⁵

Conviction of sin will always reveal the root of the problem. We inherit our sinful nature from our ancestry. We did not invent sin; the tendency to sin is in us when we are born. There is an even stronger link with our forbearers when the sin is idolatry. Idol worship opens the door to demonic involvement and demons tend to stay with people from generation to generation. That is why God says in the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”⁶

But Judah is not merely taken to account for the sins of the fathers. She not only did nothing to renounce her evil heritage, she developed it and brought it to a higher level. The punishment will be deportation and, even more seriously, enslavement to the sin of her choice.

29. The destiny of Judah 16:14-21

14 "However, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when men will no longer say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,'

15 but they will say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' For I will restore them to the land I gave their forefathers.

16 "But now I will send for many fishermen," declares the Lord, "and they will catch them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and hill and from the crevices of the rocks.

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1. Ezek. 24:15-24
 2. See Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11.
 3. Rev. 18:23
 4. Isa. 6:5
 5. John 16:8-11
 6. Ex. 20:3-6

*17 My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from me, nor is their sin concealed from my eyes.
18 I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin, because they have defiled my land with the lifeless forms of their vile images and have filled my inheritance with their detestable idols."
19 O Lord, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in time of distress, to you the nations will come from the ends of the earth and say, "Our fathers possessed nothing but false gods, worthless idols that did them no good.
20 Do men make their own gods? Yes, but they are not gods!"
21 "Therefore I will teach them — this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the Lord.*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this section: “Verses 14 and 15, repeated substantially in 23:7–8, have been seen as a scribal interpolation. However, the verses need not be regarded as displaced, since the pre-exilic prophets regularly interspersed their denunciations with expectations of a brighter future (Joel 3:18–21; Am. 9:11–15, *etc.*). The mighty act of deliverance from Egypt will be surpassed by an even greater ‘exodus’ from Babylonia. But first the helpless citizens of Judah have to be rounded up and carried off before their redemption can be achieved. The fishers (cf. Am. 4:2; Hab. 1:15; Ezk. 12:13) will see that few slip through the net to safety. The *double* (MT *mišneh*) recompense may, from an Alalah tablet, be better translated ‘proportionate,’ making the punishment equivalent to the offense. Verse 19 is typical of the Messianic vision of prophetism.”

In vv.14-16 God allows us a glance in His own heart while He pronounces judgment over Judah. His stern face hides a deep emotion that bursts to the surface. Hosea revealed a similar passion in connection with Ephraim’s condemnation. There God blurted out: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man — the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.”¹

As Harrison suggests, “I will repay them proportionally for their wickedness ...” would fit better in the character of this section than “I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin.”

Jeremiah finds himself encouraged by the expression of God’s emotions and he responds to this with his own emotional expression. The discovery of what God really feels about His wayward people gives him insight into God’s future plans with Israel and the world. He realizes that Israel will ultimately be the kingdom of priests God always intended her to be and that the nations of the earth will recognize that God is the only God in the universe. This is the harvest of the great commission Jesus gave to His disciples and to the church: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”² We may assume that God intended both Israel and all the nations of the world when He said to Jeremiah: “I will teach them — this time I will teach them my power and might. Then they will know that my name is the Lord.”

30. Sin and its dire consequences 17:1-18

*17 "Judah's sin is engraved with an iron tool, inscribed with a flint point, on the tablets of their hearts and on the horns of their altars.
2 Even their children remember their altars and Asherah poles beside the spreading trees and on the high hills.
3 My mountain in the land and your wealth and all your treasures I will give away as plunder, together with your high places, because of sin throughout your country.
4 Through your own fault you will lose the inheritance I gave you. I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you do not know, for you have kindled my anger, and it will burn forever."*

1. Hos. 11:8,9
2. Mark 16:15

5 This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord.

6 He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives.

7 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him.

8 He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

9 The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."

11 Like a partridge that hatches eggs it did not lay is the man who gains riches by unjust means. When his life is half gone, they will desert him, and in the end he will prove to be a fool.

12 A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

13 O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water.

14 Heal me, O Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.

15 They keep saying to me, "Where is the word of the Lord? Let it now be fulfilled!"

16 I have not run away from being your shepherd; you know I have not desired the day of despair. What passes my lips is open before you.

17 Do not be a terror to me; you are my refuge in the day of disaster.

18 Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.

The Word of God ought to have been engraved on the tablets of the heart of the people of Judah. God had said to them before they entered Canaan: "Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads." Since the people had not taken God's Word to heart, the devil had inscribed his own text. This was done in a way that ensured permanency. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: " 'Judah's sin' is not merely their tendency to sin, but their sinful practices — their idolatry. This is said to be graven upon the table of their heart, for it is no mere form, but carried on with passionate earnestness, and as indelible as if engraved with an iron pen."

The Bible encourages us to fill our minds with the Word of God. The Psalmist states: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."¹ And the Apostle Paul advises: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."²

As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains, "the tablets of their hearts" is "Where the new and better covenant will be written (31:31-34)" and "on the horns of their altars" is "Where the blood of the sacrifices was smeared (Lev 4:7)."

The New Living Translation renders v.2: "Even their children go to worship at their pagan altars and Asherah poles, beneath every green tree and on every high hill." *Barnes' Notes* suggests that this may be "an allusion to their sacrifices of children to Moloch. Present perhaps at some such bloodstained rite, its horrors would be engraved forever upon the memory."

V.3 has caused Bible scholars a good deal of problems and it has been suggested that the text suffered from scribes who made copying mistakes. The Hebrew reads literally: "O my mountain in the field and your substance and all your treasures and your high place throughout all your borders I will give to the spoil." Linking vv.2 and 3 together, *The Living Bible* reads: "Their youths do not forget to sin, worshipping

1. Ps. 119:11

2. Col. 3:16

idols beneath each tree, high in the mountains or in the open country down below. And so I will give all your treasures to your enemies as the price that you must pay for all your sins.” *The New Living Translation* reads v.3: “So I will hand over my holy mountain—along with all your wealth and treasures and your pagan shrines—as plunder to your enemies, for sin runs rampant in your land.” The message, however, is clear: God takes His land back and evicts His people from it.

Vv.5-11 are what God says to the people for the purpose of redemption. What Moses did for Israel at the end of their desert journey, by holding out before them a curse and a blessing, God does here for Judah. Moses said: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.”¹ And in his final address to the nation, Moses said: “This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”²

In their idolatry the devil had engraved his text on the tablets of their hearts, as vv.1 and 2 reveal. In these verses it is the flesh, their sinful nature that is the topic. Satan would not have had access to their hearts if it were not for the fact that there was a sinful nature to respond to his temptations. The devil has no influence upon those in whose heart he finds no sounding board for his lies. When Jesus was tempted by the devil, He did not sin. And on the eve of His crucifixion He told His disciples: “The prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me.”³ If we put our faith in God and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, the prince of this world will have no hold on us either.

As *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes about these verses: “It is excellent doctrine that is preached in these verses, and of general concern and use to us all, and it does not appear to have any particular reference to the present state of Judah and Jerusalem. The prophet’s sermons were not all prophetic, but some of them practical; yet this discourse, which probably we have here only the heads of, would be of singular use to them by way of caution not to misplace their confidence in the day of their distress.” Both trusting others as well as trusting ourselves to save us will bring us under the curse pronounced in these verses. Solomon’s advice in Proverbs is pertinent here: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”⁴

There was, however, also a political factor in Jeremiah’s day that provoked God’s warning here. The king and the people looked to Egypt and Assyria to be their buffer against the Babylonian threat. *The Pulpit Commentary* justly observes: “God and man, flesh and spirit, are natural antitheses (comp. ... Isaiah 31:3; ... Psalm 56:4). The prayer of the believer is, ‘Be thou (O Jehovah) their arm every morning;’ not Egypt, not Assyria, not any ‘arm of flesh.’ ”

The Hebrew text of v.6 reads: “For he shall be like the heath in the desert...” The Hebrew word “heath” is *arow`er*, which is only found in Jeremiah.⁵ R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains: “The ... shrub refers to the tamarisk, a dwarf juniper of a particularly stark and naked appearance which has no prospect of improvement ... since its stunted roots do not penetrate to the water levels beneath the surface.” The image stands in stark contrast to the one in Psalm one where the righteous is compared to “a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever

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1. Deut. 11:26-28
 2. Deut. 30:19,20
 3. John 14:30
 4. Prov. 3:5,6
 5. See also Jer. 48:6

he does prospers.”¹ The person who does not put his trust in God is like a tree cut off from its roots; it has no future.

Vv.9 and 10 of this chapter give us one of the clearest psychological analyses of human sinful nature in all of Scripture or anywhere else. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* gives this profound analysis of the text: “1. It is true in general. (1.) There is that wickedness in our hearts which we ourselves are not aware of and do not suspect to be there; nay, it is a common mistake among the children of men to think themselves, their own hearts at least, a great deal better than they really are. The heart, the conscience of man, in his corrupt and fallen state, is deceitful above all things. It is subtle and false; it is apt to supplant (so the word properly signifies); it is that from which Jacob had his name, a supplanter. It calls evil good and good evil, puts false colors upon things, and cries peace to those to whom peace does not belong. When men say in their hearts (that is, suffer their hearts to whisper to them) that there is no God, or he does not see, or he will not require, or they shall have peace though they go on; in these, and a thousand similar suggestions the heart is deceitful. It cheats men into their own ruin; and this will be the aggravation of it, that they are self-deceivers, self-destroyers. Herein the heart is desperately wicked; it is deadly, it is desperate. The case is bad indeed, and in a manner deplorable and past relief, if the conscience which should rectify the errors of the other faculties is itself a mother of falsehood and a ringleader in the delusion. What will become of a man if that in him which should be the candle of the Lord give a false light, if God’s deputy in the soul, that is entrusted to support his interests, betrays them? Such is the deceitfulness of the heart that we may truly say, Who can know it? Who can describe how bad the heart is? We cannot know our own hearts, not what they will do in an hour of temptation (Hezekiah did not, Peter did not), not what corrupt dispositions there are in them, nor in how many things they have turned aside; who can understand his errors? Much less can we know the hearts of others, or have any dependence upon them.

But, (2.) Whatever wickedness there is in the heart God sees it, and knows it, is perfectly acquainted with it and apprised of it: I the Lord search the heart. This is true of all that is in the heart, all the thoughts of it, the quickest, and those that are most carelessly overlooked by ourselves—all the intents of it, the closest, and those that are most artfully disguised, and industriously concealed from others. Men may be imposed upon, but God cannot. He not only searches the heart with a piercing eye, but he tries the reins, to pass a judgment upon what he discovers, to give everything its true character and due weight. He tries it, as the gold is tried whether it be standard or no, as the prisoner is tried whether he be guilty or no. And this judgment which he makes of the heart is in order to his passing judgment upon the man; it is to give to every man according to his ways (according to the desert and the tendency of them, life to those that walked in the ways of life, and death to those that persisted in the paths of the destroyer) and according to the fruit of his doings, the effect and influence his doings have had upon others, or according to what is settled by the word of God to be the fruit of men’s doings, blessings to the obedient and curses to the disobedient. Note, Therefore God is Judge himself, and he alone, because he, and none besides, knows the hearts of the children of men.”

The Hebrew text uses the word *ʿaqob* for “deceitful.” It is the word Isaiah uses in: “Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the *crooked* places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth.”² “Desperately wicked” is the translation of a single Hebrew *ʿanash*, meaning “incurable.” Since we cannot fathom the crookedness of our own heart, we do well to pray David’s prayer: “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”³

The Biblical Illustrator refers to the *Septuagint* for the translation of v.11: “As the partridge gathers young which she has not herself brought forth” and comments: “That is more plain and natural. The partridge is in the habit of stealing eggs from the nests of other birds of a different species, and of sitting

1. Ps. 1:3
2. Isa 40:4 - NKJV
3. Ps. 139:23,24

upon them: and then, shortly after these eggs are hatched, the young, forsaking their false parent, and associating with birds of their own order, make the old partridge look very foolish, as all her promising brood desert her.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about the partridge: “The reference to the partridge refers to the popular belief that it would hatch the eggs of other birds. Just as the fledglings soon realize the false nature of the mother and depart from the nest, so riches unjustly acquired disappear just when the owner is counting on them for security.”

Jeremiah is, obviously, again the speaker in vv.12 and 13. Looking at the temple Solomon had built, and knowing that the edifice would be completely destroyed in the near future, he says: “A glorious throne, exalted from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.” The word “from the beginning” is *ri’shown*, which is related to the word *re’shiyth* with which Scripture opens: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹ Jeremiah’s words remind of us the scene in *Matthew’s Gospel*, where the disciples draw Jesus’ attention to the temple edifice. We read: “Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. ‘Do you see all these things?’ he asked. ‘I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.’”² But in Jeremiah’s day the Shekinah glory had not left the temple yet. The edifice still symbolized the glorious hope of Israel: the presence of the Lord.

Barnes’ Notes observes about the phrase: “will be written in the dust”: “i.e., their names shall quickly disappear, unlike those graven in the rock forever (Job 19:24). A board covered with sand is used in the East to this day in schools for giving lessons in writing: but writing inscribed on such materials is intended to be immediately obliterated. Equally fleeting is the existence of those who forsake God. ‘All men are written somewhere, the saints in heaven, but sinners upon earth’ (Origen).” The expression sheds light on the New Testament story where people brought a woman accused of adultery to Jesus to set a trap for Him. We read: “But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger.”³ Our names are either written in *the book of life*, of which Jesus speaks in Revelation, or it will be written in sand.⁴

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments: “The Jews, though boasting that they were the people of God, had no portion in heaven, no status before God and His angels. Contrast ‘written in heaven,’ i.e., in the muster-roll of its blessed citizens (Luke 10:20). Also contrast the expression for perpetual remembrance, ‘written in a book,’ and ‘in the rock forever’ (Job 19:23-24).” Isaiah uses an expression that speaks of God’s even more intimate knowledge of us: “See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”⁵ In the Jewish mind the remembrance of a name was the equivalent of eternal life. Someone was considered dead in the ultimate sense of the word if his name was no longer remembered. This is illustrated in the story of the daughters of Zelophehad. We read: “The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They approached the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly, and said, ‘Our father died in the desert. He was not among Korah’s followers, who banded together against the Lord, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. Why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives.’”⁶

The words “they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water” are a reference to God’s own statement in the beginning of this book: “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”⁷

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1. Gen. 1:1
 2. Matt. 24:1,2
 3. John 8:6
 4. See Rev. 3:5.
 5. Isa. 49:16
 6. Num. 27:1-4

About Jeremiah's prayer, *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: "The occasion for this prayer is furnished by the attacks of his enemies, who ask in scorn what then has become of that which he proclaims as the word of the Lord, why it does not come to pass. Hence we see that the discourse, of which this complaint is the conclusion, was delivered before the first invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans. So long as his announcements were not fulfilled, the unbelieving were free to persecute him as a false prophet (cf. Deut 18:22), and to give out that his prophecies were inspired by his own spite against his people."

"Heal me" is the translation of the Hebrew word *raphah*, which can be either a verb or a noun; it can mean "to cure," or "a physician." We find it in the verse: "Then Abraham prayed to God, and God *healed* Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again."¹ And in "If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, *who heals you*."² In Hebrew it reads *Yahweh rop^a`ekaa*, which is a form of *Yahweh raphah*. "Save me" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *yasha`*, meaning: "to be open", or "to be safe." From this verb the name Jeshua is formed, which is the Hebrew name for Jesus.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about vv. 14-18: "This elegant poetic section is a plea by Jeremiah for vindication. Since God is Israel's only hope, it is natural for the prophet to appeal to Him for healing and restoration. RSV *let it come* (15) is better than *if only it would happen*, a taunting remark, since his prophecies of doom had so far failed to materialize. The MT of v.16 contains textual corruptions. The sense seem to be that Jeremiah was not going to abandon his prophetic functions simply because he had been persecuted. Instead he prayed for grace to withstand opposition until the truth should be manifested, when all would see that is was God's word, not his own, that he had been proclaiming faithfully."

The question is what kind of healing Jeremiah asks for and for whom does he ask it? The primary application would be personal, since the prophet experienced the consequences of his preaching as an attack upon his own well-being. He had earlier uttered the complaint "Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? Will you be to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails?"³ And "save me" can be seen as a request for protection against the plots of his people against him. But there may also be an element of intercession in behalf of the people who are condemned to captivity and death. The deceitful heart, mentioned earlier, cannot change itself, but God can change a heart, as we will see later in this book. The death of the temple, that is the destruction of the place of God's revelation is, in the end, an image of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

V.15 does not speak of a death wish of the people, but a taunt of unbelievers. The people did not recognize their sin, which would bring the death sentence upon them, so they teased Jeremiah with this sneer to prove the truth of his prophecy. When that proof came, it was too late for them to take back their words. These people were more in need of healing and salvation than the prophet himself.

The phrase "I have not run away from being your shepherd" presents some difficulties of interpretation. The Hebrew verb *'uwts* has the primary meaning of "to press," or "to hurry." We find it in the verse: "With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, '*Hurry!* Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished.'⁴ The overall meaning seems to be that Jeremiah says to the Lord that he did not ask to become a prophet; it was God's idea. But the word "shepherd" is usually not applied to prophets; it rather designates a king. Some Bible scholars suggest that Jeremiah may have been a shepherd like Amos,⁵ before becoming a prophet. The idea seems to be

7. Jer. 2:13
1. Gen. 20:17
2. Ex. 15:26
3. Jer. 15:18
4. Gen. 19:15

farfetched. It is true that, as a member of the priest cast, Jeremiah would have possessed pastures in the city that was assigned to the priests.

Although the words are a prayer addressed to God, the content is uttered for the benefit of the people also. Jeremiah is saying to God and to those who hear him that he had not asked for the job and the message he preached was not his own, but God's.

The Hebrew word, rendered "terror" is *mechittah* meaning: "a ruin." We find it in the Psalm of Ethan the Ezrahite, who complained to the Lord about His breaking of the covenant with David: "You have broken through all his walls and reduced his strongholds to ruins."¹ Jeremiah realizes that the God who is his refuge is at the same time "a consuming fire."²

Jeremiah's execration in v.18 seems to us to be an unwarranted and "unchristian" reaction to the opposition he encountered. It is one thing to pray that opponents be put to shame, it is something else when we pray: "Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction." *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* suggests: "Jeremiah had not desired the woeful day upon his country in general; but as to his persecutors, in a just and holy indignation at their malice, he prays, Bring upon them the day of evil, in hope that the bringing of it upon them might prevent the bringing of it upon the country; if they were taken away, the people would be better; 'therefore destroy them with a double destruction; let them be utterly destroyed, root and branch, and let the prospect of that destruction be their present confusion.' This the prophet prays, not at all that he might be avenged, nor so much that he might be eased, but that the Lord may be known by the judgments which he executes."

31. An appendix on the sabbath 17:19-27

19 This is what the Lord said to me: "Go and stand at the gate of the people, through which the kings of Judah go in and out; stand also at all the other gates of Jerusalem.

20 Say to them, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and all people of Judah and everyone living in Jerusalem who come through these gates.

21 This is what the Lord says: Be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem.

22 Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers.

23 Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline.

24 But if you are careful to obey me, declares the Lord, and bring no load through the gates of this city on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy by not doing any work on it,

25 then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this city with their officials. They and their officials will come riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by the men of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, and this city will be inhabited forever.

26 People will come from the towns of Judah and the villages around Jerusalem, from the territory of Benjamin and the western foothills, from the hill country and the Negev, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings, incense and thank offerings to the house of the Lord.

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

5. See Amos 7:14.

1. Ps. 89:40

2. Heb. 12:29

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section with: “This short prose section again demonstrates the conditional nature of the prophecies of doom, which could be revoked if the sinner evidenced true repentance. Jeremiah makes it clear that the people held their destiny in their own hands. ... Profanation of the sabbath (21) had become commonplace, in defiance of God’s commands to keep it holy. If the ethical ideals of the covenant are observed, the legitimate Davidic dynasty will be maintained, and from the north will come only peaceful migration of people. If not, the complete destruction of Jerusalem is portended.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This passage stands in absolutely no connection with the preceding and the following prophecies; and we have just the same sense of suspicion in meeting with it here, in the midst of perfectly general exhortations, as in reading the parallel exhortations to Sabbath-keeping in Isaiah 56 and 58, surrounded as they are by the moving and almost evangelical rhetoric of the second part of Isaiah.”

Bible scholars observe that Jeremiah does not specify which gate is meant here. We read that it is the one “through which the kings of Judah go in and out.” In Ezekiel’s vision of the new temple, we read: “When the prince provides a freewill offering to the Lord—whether a burnt offering or fellowship offerings—the gate facing east is to be opened for him. He shall offer his burnt offering or his fellowship offerings as he does on the Sabbath day. Then he shall go out, and after he has gone out, the gate will be shut.”¹ So it is probably the East Gate at which Jeremiah began his proclamation here. In present-day Israel there is an east gate that leads to the temple square which is permanently closed with bricks.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the Sabbath: Sabbath - the non-observance of it was a chief cause of the captivity, the number of years of the latter, seventy, being exactly made to agree with the number of Sabbaths which elapsed during the 490 years of their possession of Canaan from Saul to their removal (Lev 26:34-35; exactly fulfilled according to 2 Chron 36:21). On the restoration, therefore, stress was especially laid on Sabbath observance, and for this purpose Nehemiah ordered ‘the gates of Jerusalem’ to be kept closed during the Sabbath, to prevent Sabbath traffic, the very sin reprobated by Jeremiah (Jer 17:21), (Neh 13:19).”

We must observe that this section does not constitute a plea for a legalistic observance of the Sabbath as became evident in post-exilic Israel and among the Pharisees of Jesus’ time. To carry a load through the city gates on the Sabbath is used here as symbolic for disobedience to God’s commands in general. The original meaning of the Sabbath was participation in the rest God had instituted as part of His creation. We read: “By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”² And in the Ten Commandments: “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”³

The author of Hebrews puts this in a New Testament perspective by connecting the keeping of the Sabbath with entering into the Promised Land. We read: “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ And yet his work has been finished since

1. Ezek. 46:12
2. Gen. 2:2,3
3. Ex. 20:8-11

the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ And again in the passage above he says, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken later about another day. There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.”¹

It is when we enter into God’s rest that we rest from our own work, that is from the works inspired by our sinful nature. It is this rest Jesus opened up in the invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”²

For Judah, keeping the Sabbath would have meant physical protection and stability. We have no guarantee that our lives will not be physically, emotionally or in any other way turned upside-down. But any outward change or pressure will not be able to affect our relationship of resting in Jesus Christ.

32. The prophet visits the potter’s house 18:1-17

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 "Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message."

3 So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel.

4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

5 Then the word of the Lord came to me:

6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed,

8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.

9 And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted,

10 and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

11 "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the Lord says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’

12 But they will reply, ‘It’s no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.’”

13 Therefore this is what the Lord says: "Inquire among the nations: Who has ever heard anything like this? A most horrible thing has been done by Virgin Israel.

14 Does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow?

15 Yet my people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They made them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up.

16 Their land will be laid waste, an object of lasting scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will shake their heads.

1. Heb. 4:1-11

2. Matt. 11:28-30

17 Like a wind from the east, I will scatter them before their enemies; I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster."

The Pulpit Commentary states: "This chapter is the introduction of a group of prophecies (extending to Jeremiah 25.) of various dates; their sequence has evidently not been determined by chronological considerations. The prophet's first object is, perhaps, to refute the scoffing inquiry (... Jeremiah 17:15), 'What has become of the [threatening] word of Jehovah?' and to justify the glorious premise given at the conclusion of the last chapter. The fulfill-merit of threatenings and promises alike is conditioned by the moral attitude of the people (comp. ... Ezekiel 33:11). God, as it were, holds them in either hand, and there is still time (contrast ... Jeremiah 16:21) to choose the sweet and reject the bitter by sincerely turning to their true Friend. Unhappily the people misuses its day of grace, and, instead of listening to God's messenger, seeks to rid itself of him by persecution. Upon this, Jeremiah falls again into the tone of bitter complaint, and, so far from interceding for his people, does the very opposite."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: "Pottery-making was a familiar activity throughout the Near East, and the lessons taught here would be appreciated readily enough in Judah. The material probably dates from the early days of Jehoiakim."

This section of the potter's house provides one of the clearest illustrations of God's dealing with mankind. It emphasizes the fact that God is in charge. But that does not mean that man's attitude plays no role in the way God deals with him. It is actually in the way the comparison breaks down that the deepest truth is learned from this object lesson. In the picture the potter imposes his will on the clay and the clay is lifeless and without a will of its own. If applied literally to human beings it would give credence to Calvin's doctrine of predestination, which states that man is dead in sin and that God's grace is irresistible. In the application, however, God takes man's repentance into account and changes or confirms His plan accordingly.

The first application is to Israel as a nation. The pot is not a person but a people. It is true that a nation consists of people and that collective repentance is the total of personal turning from sin. But it is not the personal aspect that is emphasized here. What God wanted the people of Judah to understand was that they were about to be wiped out as a nation. In order to avoid such disaster they would have to consult together and decide to change as a nation and each person privately. They had to understand that personal sin leads to collective guilt. As the proverb reads: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."¹

God had chosen Israel to be the vehicle of His revelation on earth. Just prior to giving the Ten Commandments, God had said: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."² The flawed pot in the potter's hand represented the nation that did not live up to her calling because of her sin of idolatry. God was about to take the clay off the wheel and throw it back on to make another vessel out of it.

When later God's mode of revelation changed and He revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the same thing would happen to Israel.

This chapter is the introduction of a group of prophecies (extending to Jeremiah 25.) of various dates; their sequence has evidently not been determined by chronological considerations. The prophet's first object is, perhaps, to refute the scoffing inquiry (... Jeremiah 17:15), 'What has become of the [threatening] word of Jehovah?' and to justify the glorious premise given at the conclusion of the last chapter. The fulfill-merit of threatenings and promises alike is conditioned by the moral attitude of the people (comp. ... Ezekiel 33:11). God, as it were, holds them in either hand, and there is still time (contrast ... Jeremiah 16:21) to

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1. Prov. 14:34
 2. Ex. 19:5,6

choose the sweet and reject the bitter by sincerely turning to their true Friend. Unhappily the people misuses its day of grace, and, instead of listening to God’s messenger, seeks to rid itself of him by persecution. Upon this, Jeremiah falls again into the tone of bitter complaint, and, so far from interceding for his people, does the very opposite.”

Jesus told the parable of the tenants of a vineyard who refused to pay the owner their rent and ended by murdering the owner’s son. He concluded the story with: “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”¹ After Israel’s rejection of the Messiah, the Apostle Paul picks up Jeremiah’s theme and writes: “One of you will say to me: ‘Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?’ But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? ‘Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’” Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?”²

There is, of course, a personal application to be made from Jeremiah’s visit to the potter’s house. If we see ourselves as clay in the hands of God, we have come to the place of the surrender of our will to the will of God. Becoming clay in God’s hands presupposes submission. This is expressed beautifully in Adelaide Pollard’s hymn:

“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.”

Another discrepancy between the picture and reality is that in the image the imperfection of the pot is either the potter’s fault or it is a flaw in the material. The Hebrew word, translated “marred” is *shachath*, which means: “to decay,” or “to ruin.” We find it in the verse: “Now the earth was *corrupt* in God’s sight and was full of violence. God saw how *corrupt* the earth had become, for all the people on earth had *corrupted* their ways.” The fact that God is perfect rules out the possibility that Israel’s ruin is the result of His mishandling the process of making the vehicle of His revelation what He intended it to be. On the other hand if Israel’s imperfection is the cause of failure, what is the point of throwing the clay back on the wheel?

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary makes some penetrating observations about this section: “That God will not be a loser by any in his glory, at long run, but, if he be not glorified by them, he will be glorified upon them. If the potter’s vessel be marred for one use, it shall serve for another; those that will not be monuments of mercy shall be monuments of justice. ... That, in the exercise of this authority and ability, he always goes by fixed rules of equity and goodness. He dispenses favors indeed in a way of sovereignty, but never punishes by arbitrary power. ... It is an undoubted truth that a sincere conversion from the evil of sin will be an effectual prevention of the evil of punishment; and God can as easily raise up a penitent people from their ruins as the potter can make anew the vessel of clay when it was marred in his hand.”

Although it is true that the actual issue is Israel’s call to be the means by which God reveals Himself to the world, that topic is not mentioned in this context. The focus is on the obstacles that keep Judah from being what God wants her to be. The original mandate was for Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”³ Israel could not be a kingdom of priests if she were not a holy nation. Holiness is a prerequisite for priesthood. The only way Israel as a nation could be holy was if it served the Lord. God had

1. Matt. 21:43
2. Rom. 9:19-24
3. Ex. 19:6

said: “I the LORD am holy — I who make you holy.”¹ That is the reason the focus of this section is not on any kind of sinful acts but on idolatry. Israel’s cardinal sin as a nation was that they no longer regarded God as their Lord and Master but worshipped the deities of the nations they had conquered. All sins are derived from this number one offense.

Israel’s sin was unique in that no other nation had ever exchanged gods. The idols pagan nations worshipped were seen as part of their national identity. To become unfaithful to one’s god would make one a traitor to his nation. It is significant that God uses the title “virgin Israel.” It points to a relationship that is meant to be consummated, but will not be because of unfaithfulness.

There are various problems in the text of v.14 as it has come to us. Some copying mistakes of the original must have been made, which makes it difficult to determine the primary meaning. *The New International Version* reads: Does the snow of Lebanon ever vanish from its rocky slopes? Do its cool waters from distant sources ever cease to flow?” *The New King James Version* follows the older interpretations: “Will a man leave the snow water of Lebanon, which comes from the rock of the field? Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters?” *The New Living Translation*: “Does the snow ever melt high up in the mountains of Lebanon? Do the cold, flowing streams from the crags of Mount Hermon ever run dry?”

The Interlinear Hebrew Bible gives a rather complicated reading of the verse: “Will a man leave the snow of the field which comes from the rock of Lebanon? Or shall be forsaken the cold waters that come flowing from another field?” The Hebrew verb *ʾazab* means “to loosen.” There seems to be no reason to introduce the word “man” in it. The reason for doing so may be found in the first verse that uses that verb: “For this reason a man *will leave* his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”² The most logical interpretation may be that God uses the eternal snow of Lebanon as an object lesson to illustrate how illogical Israel’s infidelity is. It is a fact of nature that high mountain peaks are covered with snow all year long. By exchanging Yahweh for local idols Israel did something that was the most unnatural thing imaginable. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “All translations of this verse are conjectural, however. The sense seems to be that the nation’s sin is completely irrational in character, as contrasted with the course of nature, which is steadfast and consistent. Such unnatural and apostate behavior from a covenant people can only result in punishment.”

The idols are described as “worthless idols.” This is the translation of the Hebrew word *shav*’, meaning: “evil,” or “lying.” We find the word in the verse: “Do not spread *false* reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.”³ Behind the idol is an evil spirit which leads the idolater astray. The man who turns to idols leaves the narrow path, the way God has traced for him. Jeremiah mentioned “the ancient paths” earlier in: “This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, ‘ We will not walk in it.’”⁴ People who forget God lose their way in life.

This is not a plea for following the well-trodden paths. In *The Parable of the Sower*, the seed that fell along the path was the Word of God that did not penetrate the heart of man.⁵ There is something to say for Robert Frost’s choice of the path that is not well-trodden. But there is a tradition that can be traced from generation to generation that cannot be abandoned without incurring eternal injury.

1. Lev. 21:8

2. Gen. 2:24

3. Ex. 23:1

4. Jer. 6:16

5. Matt. 13:4,19

The announcement of judgment in v.16 is a literal quotation from Moses' prediction. We read: "I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths."¹ V.17 is also a quotation from Moses: "Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods — gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known."²

33. A second plot against Jeremiah 18:18-23

18 They said, "Come, let's make plans against Jeremiah; for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophets. So come, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says."

19 Listen to me, O LORD; hear what my accusers are saying!

20 Should good be repaid with evil? Yet they have dug a pit for me. Remember that I stood before you and spoke in their behalf to turn your wrath away from them.

21 So give their children over to famine; hand them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives be made childless and widows; let their men be put to death, their young men slain by the sword in battle.

22 Let a cry be heard from their houses when you suddenly bring invaders against them, for they have dug a pit to capture me and have hidden snares for my feet.

23 But you know, O LORD, all their plots to kill me. Do not forgive their crimes or blot out their sins from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "The prophetic utterances had evidently aroused such indignation in influential circles that a conspiracy was the result. In this section Jeremiah prays passionately for his enemies to be punished. The allusion (18) to priestly instruction (RSV *the law shall not perish from the priests*; NEB *there will still be priests to guide us*) seems to imply that people were quite satisfied with the depraved leadership given by their own priests and false prophets, thus scorning Jeremiah's proclamations of doom, and using his message as a basis for charges of treason. ... This vehement cry for vindication has been assumed to be so out of character with Jeremiah's other utterances as to be the work of an entirely different author. However, it is not just a matter of wounded pride demanding revenge. Jeremiah is so committed to the ideals of Sinai that he is pleading for the divine cause, and not its mere embodiment in his utterances, to be vindicated. This latter is particularly evident in verses 21-23. ... In a passionate response Jeremiah prays for dire penalties upon his enemies, rather than the populace as a whole. While such utterances may constitute a rather shocking revelation of Jeremiah's humanity, they are consistent with other maledictions uttered in the Lord's name (cf. Ps. 137:9). The Christian attitude towards one's enemies is markedly different (cf. Mt 5:44; Rom. 12:20)."

Our problem, as Harrison observes, is that we have been taught that vengeance belongs to God and not to us and that it is sinful to pray along the line Jeremiah is praying here. It was Moses who recorded God's pronouncement, which New Testament writers quoted: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."³

Barnes' Notes observes: "Though they did not flow from personal vengeance, but from a pure zeal for God's honor, yet they belong to the legal spirit of the Jewish covenant. We must not, because we have been shown a 'more excellent way,' condemn too harshly that sterner spirit of justice which animated so many of the saints of the earlier dispensation."

1. Lev. 26:33,34
2. Deut. 28:64
3. Deut. 32:35; Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30

The only consolatory feature to be found in this curse Jeremiah puts upon his enemies is that he may have uttered these words as a public prayer, or at least published them in the same way he made his prophecies public. That then would be a deterrent for the people who heard them. But we have no compelling reasons to believe this to be the case.

34. A parabolic oracle of an earthenware bottle 19:1-15

1 This is what the LORD says: "Go and buy a clay jar from a potter. Take along some of the elders of the people and of the priests

2 and go out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, near the entrance of the Potsherd Gate. There proclaim the words I tell you,

3 and say, 'Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and people of Jerusalem. This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Listen! I am going to bring a disaster on this place that will make the ears of everyone who hears of it tingle.

4 For they have forsaken me and made this a place of foreign gods; they have burned sacrifices in it to gods that neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah ever knew, and they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent.

5 They have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as offerings to Baal — something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.

6 So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when people will no longer call this place Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter.

7 "In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hands of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

8 I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds.

9 I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives.'

10 "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching,

11 and say to them, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired. They will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.

12 This is what I will do to this place and to those who live here, declares the LORD. I will make this city like Topheth.

13 The houses in Jerusalem and those of the kings of Judah will be defiled like this place, Topheth — all the houses where they burned incense on the roofs to all the starry hosts and poured out drink offerings to other gods.'"

14 Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD's temple and said to all the people,

15 "This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.'"

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "The earthenware container symbolized the final form of Judah's spiritual obduracy (*cf.* Rev. 22:11), and the act of shattering it in the presence of senior citizens and priests indicated the coming doom. The valley of Ben-hinnom (*cf.* Je. 7:31), south of Jerusalem, was a contemporary locale for Molech worship. Under Josiah the shrine was destroyed and later on the valley was used for burning garbage and cremating the bodies of criminals."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about the Valley of Ben Hinnom: “It was near the walls of Jerusalem, ‘by the entry of the gate Harsith’ (Jer 19:2); the Valley Gate opened into it (Neh 2:13; 3:13). The boundary between Judah and Benjamin ran along it (Josh 15:8; 18:16). It was the scene of idolatrous practices in the days of Ahaz (2 Chron 28:3) and of Manasseh, who ‘made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom’ (2 Chron 33:6), but Josiah in the course of his reforms ‘defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children (margin ‘son’) of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech’ (2 Kings 23:10). It was on account of these evil practices that Jeremiah (Jer 7:32; 19:6) announced the change of name. Into this valley dead bodies were probably cast to be consumed by the dogs, as is done in the Wady er-Rababi today, and fires were here kept burning to consume the rubbish of the city. Such associations led to the Ge-Hinnom (New Testament ‘Gehenna’) becoming the ‘type of Hell.’ ”

God orders Jeremiah to go back to the potter’s house, presumably the same place where he was in the previous chapter. This time he had to buy one of the potter’s finished products. The clay jar had been fired in the kiln. This was no longer an object that could be remodeled as the lump of clay in the former object lesson. The Apostle Paul compares us to earthen vessels. Speaking of the Gospel message, he says: “We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”¹ Paul suggests that we are vulnerable and frail and that it is what is inside us that gives meaning and value to us as human beings. The jar Jeremiah buys is an empty one, symbolizing the vanity and meaninglessness to which Judah has been reduced in her idolatry.

According to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the Valley of Ben Hinnom was probably no longer used as a place of idol worship where infants were sacrificed to Moloch. Ever since the days of King Josiah it had become the garbage pile and sewage dump of the city. The people of Jeremiah’s day did not have the same perspective on the place as we have since Jesus used that valley, Gehenna, as a symbol of hell, a place where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.”² For us, Jeremiah’s object lesson is performed at the brink of hell, which lends enormous power of conviction to it.

The city gate through which the party had to pass in order to arrive at the place of demonstration is called “the Potsherd Gate.” As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “There is evidently a connection between the name of the gate and the action performed by Jeremiah.”

There is in Jeremiah’s symbolic act of breaking the jar a veiled prophecy of the judgment of the Messiah, of whom Psalm Two states: “You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”³

The Bible gives us few details about the rites of idol worship. It is generally understood that Baal is identical to Molech or Moloch, at least in this passage. Much of the particulars about the practices come from sources outside Scripture. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: “The image of Moloch was a human figure with a bull’s head and outstretched arms, ready to receive the children destined for sacrifice. The image of metal was heated red hot by a fire kindled within, and the children laid on its arms rolled off into the fiery pit below. In order to drown the cries of the victims, flutes were played, and drums were beaten; and mothers stood by without tears or sobs, to give the impression of the voluntary character of the offering.” It is about this horror that God says: “something I did not command or mention, nor did it enter my mind.”

We can hardly imagine a clearer proof of human depravity than this kind of sacrifice. To throw away one’s own child into the jaws of a demonic monster is contrary to all that natural human affection stands for. We see the same kind of depravity in the cannibalism that is predicted to be practiced during the coming siege of Jerusalem. When God says: “I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and

1. II Cor. 4:7
2. Mark 9:48
3. Ps. 2:9

they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives," He does not mean that He orders them to do so, but that He takes away from them His refraining presence which will deliver them to the dominion of him whom Jesus called "a murderer from the beginning."¹

Actually, Moses had issued that warning centuries earlier, even before Israel entered Canaan, saying: "Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the LORD your God has given you."² Both Moses' words and Jeremiah's prophecy here are meant to be a warning, a shock treatment that will call people back from their rush to perdition. The jar had not yet been broken. There was still time for people to turn around and repent.

Bible scholars do not agree about the meaning of the name "Tophet." *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states that it could refer to the drums beaten to drown the shrieks of the children made to pass through the fire to Moloch, since "toph" means "drum" in Hebrew.

Having announced the Lord's judgment upon the nation, Jeremiah is ordered to break the jar in pieces before the eyes of those present. The "Homiletics" section of *The Pulpit Commentary* states about this segment: "That was a strange scene — the royal family, the nobles, the chief priests, together with the populace of Jerusalem, gathered, at the summons of a prophet whose power could not be ignored though his teaching was opposed, in the valley of Hinnom, now reeking with the odors of foul crime; and the prophet facing them, alone and fearless, with a common potter's vessel in his hand, while he draws a most awful picture of impending calamity, and sternly charges his audience with the terrible wickedness which is bringing it upon their heads, and brings his discourse to a dramatic climax by breaking the vessel to pieces."

From the mention that Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, we assume that Jeremiah obeyed the Lord's orders and carried out the assignment, although that is not stated here. The announcement at the Ben Hinnom valley had been to a select audience of elders of the people and of the priests; in the temple court Jeremiah repeats the same message before the general public. Whether or not he broke another jar there, we are not told.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "From 19:14 to 20:6 the narrative is written in the third person, suggesting that this section may have been the work of Baruch."

35. Jeremiah in the stocks 20:1-6

1 When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the chief officer in the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things,

2 he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD's temple.

3 The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The LORD's name for you is not Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib.

4 For this is what the LORD says: 'I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will hand all Judah over to the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword.

5 I will hand over to their enemies all the wealth of this city — all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon.

6 And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.'"

1. John 8:44

2. Deut. 28:53

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: “The boldness of the prophet in standing in the precincts of the Temple to deliver a message of desolation brought immediate retaliation from the authorities. *Pashhur ben Immer* was the chief officer of the Temple at the close of the monarchy. Pashhur and Immer are personal names here, but later on they became family designations (*cf.* Ezr. 2:27f.; 10:20). From the references to Pashhur in 21:1 and 38:1 the name would seem to have been fairly common. As the *pāqîd nāqîd* (AV *chief governor*) the *chief officer* (*cf.* 29:26) was apparently the immediate subordinate of the High Priest and maintained order in the area of the Temple. The beating was perhaps with forty stripes, which in St Paul’s day had been reduced slightly (*cf.* 2 Cor 11:24) for fear of exceeding the legal limit (Dt. 25:3). The stocks (MT *mahpeket*, from a root ‘to distort’) were a form of scaffold in which prisoners were detained in a crooked or confined position which produced cramped muscles (*cf.* 29:26; 2 Ch. 16:10). The location was at a gate on the north side of the Temple, not the city gate of Benjamin in 37:13; 38:7. Despite opposition from various sources, Pashhur apparently thought better of his deed, releasing Jeremiah after an overnight stay in confinement. If he thought that this act of clemency would modify the stern prophetic message he was mistaken, however, for the prophet was determined to remain true to his vocation, no matter what the cost to himself. Pashhur is himself made the symbol of the universal terror which will grip Judah once the Babylonians enter the southern kingdom. The phrase *mr missbîb* (RSV *Terror on every side*) recurs in 6:25; 20:10; 46:5 and 49:29.”

This is the first instance in which Jeremiah suffers physically as a result of his prophetic ministry. When God called Jeremiah, He had said: “Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land — against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you.”¹ Jeremiah may have supposed that this promise constituted protection against corporal abuse. Finding out that such was not the case came as a complete shock to him. This explains Jeremiah’s anger toward Pashhur. We may assume that Jeremiah’s execration was divinely inspired, but it was also fueled by the prophet’s painful physical experience.

If the leaders of Judah had concluded that Jeremiah was a false prophet, they ought to have put him to death. To give him forty lashes and put him in jail for one night was not a punishment warranted by Scripture. God had said to Moses: “A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.”² In substituting capital punishment for beating, Pashhur condemned himself, because it implies that he believed that God had sent Jeremiah.

Evidently, Pashhur himself acted as a prophet. We understand from v.6 that he was one of the prophets who proclaimed peace for Jerusalem. The terror Pashhur would experience would not just be to see his compatriots killed and Judah go into exile, but to realize that the message he had preached was a lie.

Jeremiah’s message that the temple would be destroyed was as unacceptable to Judah of that day as it was to the people in Jesus’ time. One of the accusations against Jesus was that He had predicted the destruction of the temple. We read in Matthew: “Finally two [witnesses] came forward and declared, ‘This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.’”³ Words like that hurt the people in their national pride.

36. The dissatisfaction of the prophet with his lot 20:7-18

7 O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me.

1. Jer. 1:17-19
2. Deut. 18:20
3. Matt. 26:60,61

8 Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.

9 But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

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

11 But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonor will never be forgotten.

12 O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

13 Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

14 Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed!

15 Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, who made him very glad, saying, "A child is born to you — a son!"

16 May that man be like the towns the LORD overthrew without pity. May he hear wailing in the morning, a battle cry at noon.

17 For he did not kill me in the womb, with my mother as my grave, her womb enlarged forever.

18 Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* states: "This is a powerful poetic section which contains unusual psychological insights, not merely in relation to Jeremiah himself but for canonical prophecy as a whole because of the self-disclosure of profound emotional conflict. Jeremiah's sensitive nature appears in his reaction to the sarcasm and ridicule with which his message was received. His situation was all the more acute because his burning prophetic vocation compelled him to testify concerning covenant spirituality despite all opposition from his beloved countrymen. Thus it is hardly surprising that the emotional tension and conflict which resulted found occasional expression in an outburst of intense feeling such as that indicated here. God had induced Jeremiah to exercise a prophetic function when under other circumstances his personality would have been expressed quite differently. He prophesied at a time when the popular view demanded that the predictions be fulfilled within a fairly short interval, otherwise they would be dismissed as false. Because Jeremiah's words remained unfulfilled for so long, people just ridiculed him whenever he spoke about the future. For a person of sensitive disposition this was particularly embarrassing and offensive. The consistent theme of his message is expressed in the phrase *violence and destruction* (8), which provoked the derision of his audience. Yet so overpowering was the prophetic urge that, even if he tried to suppress it, the words flared up like fire inside him and burned until he made the pronouncements."

V.7 reads in *The New International Version*: "O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me." The Hebrew word *pathah*, "deceive" may be less harsh than it sounds. The literal meaning is: "to open," usually figuratively in a mental or moral sense. In most cases in which it is used in Scripture it means: "to entice." We find it in the verse: "If a man *seduces* a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife."¹ But also in: "Through patience a ruler can be *persuaded*, and a gentle tongue can break a bone."² *The New King James Version* renders it: "O LORD, You induced me, and I was persuaded; You are stronger than I, and have prevailed." *The New Living Translation*: "O LORD, you persuaded me, and I allowed myself to be persuaded. You are stronger than I am, and you overpowered me."

1. Ex. 22:16

2. Prov. 25:15

The Pulpit Commentary states: “Jeremiah refers to the hesitation he originally felt to accepting the prophetic office (Jeremiah 1.). The verb does not mean ‘to deceive,’ but ‘to entice’ (so rendered in ver. 10, Authorized Version), or ‘allure.’ The same word is used in that remarkable narrative of ‘the spirit’ who offered to ‘entice’ (Authorized Version, to ‘persuade’) Ahab to ‘go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead’ (...1 Kings 22:21). In Ezekiel, too, the same case is supposed as possible of Jehovah’s ‘enticing’ a prophet (Ezekiel 15:9). The expression implies that all events are, in some sense, caused by God, even those which are, or appear to be, injurious to the individual.”

Barnes’ Notes asks the question about Jeremiah’s outburst: “Was this the result of feelings wounded by the indignities of a public scourging and a night spent in the stocks? Or was it not the mental agony of knowing that his ministry had (as it seemed) failed? He stands indeed before the multitudes with unbending strength, warning prince and people with unwavering constancy of the national ruin that would follow necessarily upon their sins. Before God he stood crushed by the thought that he had labored in vain, and spent his strength for nothing.” The Commentary continues: “It is important to notice that with this outpouring of sorrow Jeremiah’s ministry virtually closed. Though he appeared again at Jerusalem toward the end of Jehoiakim’s reign, yet it was no longer to say that by repentance the national ruin might be averted. During the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the die was cast, and all the prophet henceforward could do, was to alleviate a punishment that was inevitable.”

It is comparatively easy to serve the Lord when we find ourselves hauling in a rich harvest of souls. But some of God’s servants have been placed in places of spiritual dryness where, apparently no visible fruit is harvested. Isaiah cried out: “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”¹ And Jesus Himself found no response to His message. In that sense Jeremiah foreshadows again the Messiah. But his reaction to the non-response was not the same as Jesus’. When Jesus’ words hit the brick wall of Pharisaic hypocrisy, He said: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children.”² Like all human beings, Jeremiah was unable to understand the time in which he lived. He lacked the eternal perspective from which he could evaluate his day and age. To him the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, the captivity of the people meant the death of God’s revelation on earth. He could not see from his vantage point that what he and Judah experienced was an image of the death of God on the cross. And even if he had been able to see this, the message of the cross would have been for him meaningless as it was for the people in Paul’s day. Isaiah came closer to unraveling the mystery, when he uttered the words “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” but he also cannot have measured the depth of the message.

V.9 reads literally in Hebrew: “Then I said I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His Name. But His Word was as a fire burning in mine heart, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.” It appears that Jeremiah’s soul struggle has reached a peak here. He has come to the point where he considers walking away from his prophetic ministry. But then he realizes that the Word of God is so deeply embedded in his heart that this is not an option. He had earlier had an experience with the Word of God that made him a spiritual addict. He had said: “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.”³ Like the Apostle Paul, he had to say: “Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”⁴ Like any addiction, it is stronger than we are. God Himself says: “Is not my word like fire ... and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”⁵ As

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1. Isa. 53:1
 2. Matt. 11:25
 3. Jer. 15:16
 4. I Cor. 9:16
 5. Jer. 23:29

the *Matthew Henry's Commentary* states: “And it is really a mercy to have the word of God thus mighty in us to overpower our corruptions.”

It is our first experience with the Word of God that enslaves us to it. When we “eat the Word” it becomes part of us and denying it would be suicidal. Ezekiel describes his experience with the Word of God in these words: “And he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel.’ So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”¹ In Revelation the Apostle John has a similar experience, although with different results. We read: “Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: ‘Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.’ So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, ‘Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’ I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.”² That describes Jeremiah’s experience to a nicety.

In v.3 Jeremiah had changed Pashhur’s name into Magor-Missabib; in v.10 his “friends” give a similar name to Jeremiah: *micaabiyb maagowr* with the same meaning “fear on every side.” The suggestion is that Jeremiah’s prophetic word backfires, hitting him with the same kind of curse he had put on others.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary believes “*micaabiyb maagowr* to be a proverbial expression for a harassed condition, full of terrors, since the phrase is frequently used by Jeremiah (besides the present vv. 3, 4, and 15, it is at Jer 6:25; 46:5; 49:29; Lam 2:22).” In this Jeremiah again foreshadows our Lord Jesus Christ in that his friends try to betray him, like Judas did to Christ, and people try to set traps for him like the Pharisees did for Jesus.³

In vv.11-13, Jeremiah swings back up to the mountaintop. The Word of God that burned in him came back in the form of the promise the Lord had given him at the time of his call. God had said to him: “They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you.”⁴ He experienced some of what the Apostle Paul would later verbalize as being “more than conquerors.” Paul writes in Romans: “If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁵

The appeal to God’s knowledge of his intimate thoughts and motives is a recurring theme in *The Book of Jeremiah*.⁶ Every time Jeremiah mentions God’s probing of his deepest thoughts, he links it to God’s vengeance upon his enemies. Although this may seem strange to us, we do understand that Jeremiah does not seek personal revenge but trusts that God will make His righteousness prevail, of which Jeremiah would then benefit personally. The prophet reaches the top of the mountain in his song of praise in v.13.

The following deep descent into the valley of despair almost seems a bi-polar reaction. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about this: “Jeremiah curses the day of his birth. The passage is a further development of the complaint in ... Jeremiah 15:10, and stands in no connection with the consolatory close

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1. Ezek. 3:1-3
 2. Rev. 10:8-10
 3. See Matt. 22:15-22.
 4. Jer. 1:19
 5. Rom. 8:31, 34-39
 6. See Jer. 11:12; 17:10.

of the preceding passage. There is a very striking parallel in ... Job 3:3-12, and the question cannot be evaded, which is the original? It is difficult to believe that Jeremiah copied from an earlier poem. Deep emotion expresses itself in language suggested by the moment; and, even after retouching his discourses, Jeremiah would leave much of the original expression. But impressions of this sort cannot be unreservedly trusted. The argument from parallel passages is only a subsidiary one in the determination of the date of books.”

There is no reason to believe that Jeremiah would not have Job’s utterance in mind when he used the same kind of language. Using the written Word that was available to him at that time actually increases the value of his speech. Jesus quoted David’s Psalm when He cried out in the agony of the cross: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”¹ In times of extreme agony the written Word provides more comfort than anything else. Actually, a comparison between Jeremiah’s words and the text in Job indicates that there is no literal, or even a free quotation. Jeremiah merely adopted the theme of Job’s complaint.

Some Bible scholars believe that the contrast between the mountaintop experience in the previous verses and this cry of despair is so great that the text may actually be out of place. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “This sudden outbreak of impatience after the happy faith of Jer 20:13 has led to much discussion. Possibly there was more of sorrow in the words than of impatience; sorrow that the earnest labor of a life had been in vain. Yet the form of the expression is fierce and indignant; and the impatience of Jeremiah is that part of his character which is most open to blame. He does not reach that elevation which is set before us by Him who is the perfect pattern of all righteousness. Our Lord was a prophet whose mission to the men of His generation equally failed, and His sorrow was even more deep; but it never broke forth in imprecations.”

There is also a sense in which Jeremiah spoke for the whole nation of Israel. At that moment in history it appeared that Israel’s birth as a nation had been in vain. Instead of becoming the kingdom of priests God had destined her to be, she became the tool of God’s enemy. There are, in fact, people in this world who would have been better off, so to speak, if they had never been born. As Jesus said about Judas: “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”² Who can fathom the mystery of perdition!

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on Jeremiah’s experience: “Too often the servants of God are impatient under present crosses, and give way to the infirmity of their old nature. Like Jeremiah (Jer 20:7), they complain as if God had done them some wrong, and had not let them know in entering His service what trials were before them. But it is not God who has dealt unfairly with them, but themselves who have lost sight of the appointed conditions of His service. The Lord never allures (Jer 20:7) any to follow Him without plainly telling them the cross that awaits them, if they wish to be His disciples (Luke 9:57-62). He had not promised Jeremiah exemption from sufferings, but divine support under them. Let us, then, if tried with ‘reproach and derision,’ for conscience’ sake (Jer 20:8), ‘think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try us, as though some strange thing happened unto us: but rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, we may be glad also with exceeding joy’ (1 Peter 4:12-13).”

II. UTTERANCES RELATING TO THE KINGS OF JUDAH AND FALSE PROPHETS (21:1 – 25:14)

R. H. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* states here: “Whereas the earlier chapters dealt with affairs under Jehoiakim, the scene now shifts to the time of Zedekiah (597-587 BC) and to the fulfillment of the prophecies of destruction.

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1. Matt. 27:46; Ps. 22:1
 2. Matt. 26:24

1. The appeal of Zedekiah to Jeremiah 21:1-7

1 The word came to Jeremiah from the LORD when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah. They said:

2 "Inquire now of the LORD for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking us. Perhaps the LORD will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us."

3 But Jeremiah answered them, "Tell Zedekiah,

4 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I am about to turn against you the weapons of war that are in your hands, which you are using to fight the king of Babylon and the Babylonians who are outside the wall besieging you. And I will gather them inside this city.

5 I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and a mighty arm in anger and fury and great wrath.

6 I will strike down those who live in this city — both men and animals — and they will die of a terrible plague.

7 After that, declares the LORD, I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to their enemies who seek their lives. He will put them to the sword; he will show them no mercy or pity or compassion.'

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: "This chapter, in point of time, stands between Jer 37 and 38; since what the "princes," in Jer 38:2, represent Jeremiah as having said is exactly what we find in Jer 21:9."

The event described occurred probably during the final Babylonian attack upon Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, which led to the two-year siege of the city and its destruction. The time is 588 BC–587 BC. Zedekiah's request for information must have occurred during the ninth year of his reign.

The Book of Second Chronicles describes the reign of Zedekiah as follows: "Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the LORD his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the LORD. He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name. He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the LORD, the God of Israel."¹

Zedekiah had been made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar when the latter led Jehoiakim and part of Judah away in the first captivity. We read: "Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans. He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah."² The oath in the Name of Yahweh Zedekiah had taken brought him to submission to the Babylonian empire. Zedekiah broke this oath and rebelled against the Babylonians when he felt that Egypt would be a powerful enough bumper against the Babylonian advance. This betrayal, both to Yahweh and Nebuchadnezzar brought about the siege of Jerusalem with its fatal consequences for the nation of Judah.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia comments on the character of Zedekiah: "During the siege, which was soon resumed, Zedekiah's character, on its good and bad sides, was revealed through his frequent contact with the prophet Jeremiah. The latter was a prisoner most of the time; and the indignities which he suffered, and which the king heedlessly allowed, show how the prophet's word and office had fallen in respect (compare the treatment he received, Jer 26:16-19 with 37:15; 38:6). The king, however, was not arrogant and heartless like his brother Jehoiakim; he was weak and without consistent principles;

1. II Chron. 36:11-14

2. II Kings 24:15-17

besides, he was rather helpless and timid in the hands of his headstrong officials (compare 38:5,24-26). His regard for the word of prophecy was rather superstitious than religious: while the prophet's message and counsel were uniformly consistent, he could not bring himself to follow the will of Yahweh, and seemed to think that Yahweh could somehow be persuaded to change his plans (see Jer 37:17; 38:14-16). His position was an exceedingly difficult one; but even so, he had not the firmness, the wisdom, the consistency for it."

The political situation had changed to the point where the king and inhabitants of Jerusalem had to recognize that Jeremiah's prophesies were in the process of being fulfilled. Instead of being considered a religious fanatic who uttered meaningless revelations, Jeremiah was now seen as someone who had insight in the ways of the Lord. So the king consulted him through "Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah." We do not read that Jeremiah is given a personal audience by the king at this point. The "Pashhur" mentioned here is not the same person as the one in the previous chapter. The "wonders for us as in times past" (v.2), probably refers to the Assyrian attack upon Jerusalem during the reign of Hezekiah. The great difference between Hezekiah and Zedekiah is obvious. The former humbled himself before the Lord and trusted the Lord to intervene. Zedekiah merely demonstrated a vague hope that history would repeat itself without a necessity of confession and conversion. The Nazi government during the final siege of Berlin cherished the hope that a turn of events similar to the one experienced by King Frederick the Great would save their evil empire. The diary of the final days of Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's minister of propaganda, testifies to this.

V.4 reads literally in Hebrew: "Thus says the LORD (Yahweh), the God (Elohim) of Israel, 'Behold I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls and I will assemble them into the midst of this city.' " This seems to mean that, in the same way Zedekiah and Judah are resisting the Babylonians, God will resist them. God will use the sword they brandish against Nebuchadnezzar against them and they will be killed. It seems natural that, when attacked, one defends himself. But God wanted Zedekiah and the people to understand that the Babylonian attack was God's means of punishment for the sins of the nation. Under any other circumstance, Jeremiah's insistence that they surrender to the Babylonians would have been treason.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: "The siege of the capital is still in its initial phase. Those resisting the Babylonians in Judah will be forced to retreat to Jerusalem to await the final enemy onslaught. God has destined the Babylonians as his agents for punishment of recalcitrant Israel (5). No quarter will be given to the besieged and their resistance will be weakened further by a devastating plague (6), the survivors of which will fall captive to the Babylonians. Because the city has elected to resist the aggressor, death will overtake its inhabitants (7), in accordance with normal rules of warfare in the Near East, and the whole area will be pillaged as the ultimate punishment of apostasy."

2. Capitulate to the invaders 21:8-10

8 "Furthermore, tell the people, 'This is what the Lord says: See, I am setting before you the way of life and the way of death.

9 Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague. But whoever goes out and surrenders to the Babylonians who are besieging you will live; he will escape with his life.

10 I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the Lord. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'

Vv.8-10 contain a message to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jeremiah could have told them this himself but at this point he no longer speaks in public. He wanted Zedekiah's envoys to tell the people that they should disregard government directives and surrender individually to the enemy to save their lives. It seems highly doubtful that Zedekiah's messengers would pass on this message to the public. They would have risked their own lives in doing so, since that would be considered an act of treason.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about Jeremiah's advice to surrender to the enemy: "Little wonder that Jeremiah was regarded as a traitor. But his was a higher patriotism; godliness was to him the only reason for the nation's being, as well as its only hope of survival."

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments: "The counsel given in vv. 8-12 to the people was during the siege repeatedly given by Jeremiah both to the king and to the people, cf. Jer 38:1 ff., 38:17 ff., and 27:11 ff., and many of the people acted by his advice, cf. 38:19; 39:9; 52:15. But the defenders of the city, the authorities, saw therein treason, or at least a highly dangerous discouragement to those who were fighting, and accused the prophet as a traitor, 38:4 ff., cf. 37:13. Still Jeremiah, holding his duty higher than his life, remained in the city, and gave as his opinion, under conviction attained to only by divine revelation, that all resistance is useless, since God has irrevocably decreed the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment for their sins." It is, in fact, amazing that Jeremiah, giving such advice to others, never acted upon it himself. Knowing that the siege and eventual destruction of the city was an act of God for the punishment of the sins of the people, he identified with the sinners and suffered the consequences of their sins with them.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: "Jeremiah has in view Moses' words to Israel (Deut 30:19). The individuality of Jeremiah's mission from God is shown in that he urges to unconditional surrender; whereas all former prophets had urged the people to oppose their invaders (Isa 7:16; 37:33,35)." Moses' exhortation was, however, quite different in tone than Jeremiah's here. We read: "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."¹ Jeremiah's words were addressed to people who had already chosen death. This was, in a way, a second chance for them. Moses spoke not merely of physical life or death but of the spiritual eternal consequences of obedience or disobedience. Jeremiah's message was about physical survival.

The Hebrew text of v.9 reads literally: "He that abides in this city will die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goes out and falls to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be unto him for a prey." The Hebrew word for "prey" is *shalal*. Jeremiah uses the expression several times in his book.² The word "prey" is interesting and rather unusual to us in this context. In the animal world it means that one animal catches another one for food. In human warfare it means taking booty of the enemy. But in this context it is one's own life that becomes the prey. Prey can only be taken by the one who wins. There is, therefore, an element of victory in this proverb. God impresses upon us that survival is a form of victory. One has to have had the experience of coming to the brink of death to appreciate life. It takes survival experience to realize that life is more than mere existence or vegetation. "To be or not to be" is not the question. There has to be some understanding or the miracle of life to come to the point where, in Jesus' words, we have "life to the full."³

3. A message to the royal house 21:11-14

11 *"Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, 'Hear the word of the Lord;*

12 *O house of David, this is what the Lord says: "'Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.*

13 *I am against you, [Jerusalem,] you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau, declares the Lord you who say, "Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?"*

14 *I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the Lord. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you."*

1. Deut. 30:19

2. See Jer. 38:2; 39:18; 45:5.

3. John 10:10

V.12 “Administer justice every morning” is more proverbial than an indication of time. The Hebrew word *boqer*, “dawn,” can also have the meaning of “early.” *The Living Bible* reads: “Quick! Give justice to these you judge!” The fact that the “house of David” is addressed indicates that more than just King Zedekiah was involved. As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “He calls them so, because it was the greater disgrace that they had so degenerated from the piety of their forefather David: and to repress their glorying in their descent from him, as if they were therefore inviolable; but God will not spare them as apostates.” No details are given, but from the mention of oppression and robbery we conclude that the government was totally corrupt. It also appears that the legislative and the judicial branch were one and the same, which means that there were no outside controls to correct corruption of justice. But this is typical for a totalitarian state, which was what the kingdoms in the olden days all were.

Jerusalem is addressed as a single person inhabiting the rock and the valley. The city was on a hill surrounded by valleys on three sides. This physical condition led the people to see themselves as spiritually superior also. They believed their location guaranteed security in more than one way, as if even God could not do anything against them. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Jehovah, standing, as it were, on the Mount of Olives, addresses the proud city beneath him.” The people looked down upon everyone else, but God looks down upon them in more than one way. Their geographical position would be no protection against Nebuchadnezzar’s army either.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states: “ ‘Forest’ refers to the dense mass of houses built of cedar, etc., from Lebanon, and ‘burned with fire’ by Nebuzaradan at the taking of the city (Jer 22:7; 52:13; 2 Kings 25:9).”

4. Judgment upon the royal house 22:1-23:8

1 This is what the Lord says: "Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there:

2 'Hear the word of the Lord, O king of Judah, you who sit on David's throne — you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.

3 This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.

4 For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people.

5 But if you do not obey these commands, declares the Lord, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.'"

6 For this is what the Lord says about the palace of the king of Judah: "Though you are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a desert, like towns not inhabited.

7 I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire.

8 "People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, 'Why has the Lord done such a thing to this great city?'

9 And the answer will be: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and have worshiped and served other gods.'

10 I have determined to do this city harm and not good, declares the Lord. It will be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and he will destroy it with fire.'

11 "Moreover, say to the royal house of Judah, 'Hear the word of the Lord;

12 O house of David, this is what the Lord says: "'Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done — burn with no one to quench it.

13 I am against you, [Jerusalem,] you who live above this valley on the rocky plateau, declares the Lord — you who say, "Who can come against us? Who can enter our refuge?"

14 I will punish you as your deeds deserve, declares the Lord. I will kindle a fire in your forests that will consume everything around you."

22:1 This is what the Lord says: "Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there:

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9 And the answer will be: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord their God and have worshiped and served other gods.'"

10 Do not weep for the dead [king] or mourn his loss; rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.

11 For this is what the Lord says about Shallum son of Josiah, who succeeded his father as king of Judah but has gone from this place: "He will never return.

12 He will die in the place where they have led him captive; he will not see this land again."

13 "Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.

14 He says, 'I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.' So he makes large windows in it, panels it with cedar and decorates it in red.

15 "Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him.

16 He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?" declares the Lord.

17 "But your eyes and your heart are set only on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood and on oppression and extortion."

18 Therefore this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: "They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!' They will not mourn for him: 'Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!'

19 He will have the burial of a donkey — dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem."

20 "Go up to Lebanon and cry out, let your voice be heard in Bashan, cry out from Abarim, for all your allies are crushed.

21 I warned you when you felt secure, but you said, 'I will not listen!' This has been your way from your youth; you have not obeyed me.

22 The wind will drive all your shepherds away, and your allies will go into exile. Then you will be ashamed and disgraced because of all your wickedness.

23 *You who live in 'Lebanon,' who are nestled in cedar buildings, how you will groan when pangs come upon you, pain like that of a woman in labor!*

24 *"As surely as I live," declares the Lord, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off."*

25 *I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear — to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians.*

26 *I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die.*

27 *You will never come back to the land you long to return to."*

28 *Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know?*

29 *O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord!*

30 *This is what the Lord says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."*

23:1 *"Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord.*

2 *Therefore this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to the shepherds who tend my people: "Because you have scattered my flock and driven them away and have not bestowed care on them, I will bestow punishment on you for the evil you have done," declares the Lord.*

3 *"I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number.*

4 *I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord.*

5 *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.*

6 *In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.*

7 *"So then, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when people will no longer say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt,'*

8 *but they will say, 'As surely as the Lord lives, who brought the descendants of Israel up out of the land of the north and out of all the countries where he had banished them.' Then they will live in their own land."*

The following section from 22:1-23:8 contains judgment upon the royal house of Judah, starting with Zedekiah. The sequence is not chronological and it is uncertain whether what we have here is the original order. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Jeremiah often groups his prophecies, not by chronological order, but by similarity of subjects; thus Jer 22:3, 'execute judgments,' in this chapter corresponds to Jer 21:12. Grotius thinks that Jeremiah here repeats to Zedekiah what he had announced to that king's predecessors formerly (namely, his brother and brother's son), of a similar bearing, and which had since come to pass—a warning to Zedekiah. Probably, in arranging his prophecies, they were grouped for the first time in the present order—an order designed by the Holy Spirit to set forth the series of kings of Judah, all four alike failing in 'righteousness;' followed at last by the 'King,' a righteous Branch raised unto David, in the house of Judah, 'the Lord our righteousness' (Jer 23:6). The unrighteousness of Zedekiah suggested the review of his predecessors' failure in the same respects (cf. Jer 22:3 with Jer 21:12), and consequent punishment, which ought to have warned him, but did not."

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this section with: "Jeremiah 22 and 23 are connected together by similarity of subject. The temporal and spiritual leaders of the people, who are mainly responsible for the national catastrophe, receive their merited castigation. Vers. 1-8 of Jeremiah 23, properly speaking, belong to Jeremiah 22; thus we get a well-rounded discourse on the conduct of the kings, with four symmetrical

parts or strophes — vers. 1-12, 13-19, 20-30, and ... Jeremiah 23:1-8. Each begins with a general exhortation or meditation, and continues with a poetical description of the fates, successively, of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. The prophecy is concluded, according to the good old rule of Isaiah, by a Messianic promise.”

Apparently, the opening words “Go down” are not meant literally but spiritually, since, according to *The Pulpit Commentary*, the royal palace was the highest building in the city. The royal palace was the building Solomon had built. It must have surpassed the temple in beauty, since we read about it: “In the eleventh year in the month of Bul, the eighth month, the temple was finished in all its details according to its specifications. He had spent seven years building it. It took Solomon thirteen years, however, to complete the construction of his palace.”¹

The ones to whom this message is addressed are, first of all the king and his officials, but also the public, particularly those “who come through these gates,” meaning who have access to the palace. The topic is social injustice. The main accusation had been idolatry, of which social injustice is the consequence.

Evidently, the king either did nothing to stop the injustice and violence, or he practiced these evil things himself. The warning that David’s descendents would not continue to sit on David’s throne and the palace would be destroyed, points in that direction. V.4 is identical to the statement in chapter 17:25.

The Hebrew words, translated “I swear by myself, are *nishab`atiy biy*. The root word *shaba`* literally means “to be complete,” or “to seven oneself,” as if by repeating a declaration seven times. The author of Hebrews comments: “When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself.”²

Quoting a certain Canon Tristram, *The Pulpit Commentary* states about the reference to Gilead: “No one can fairly judge of Israel’s heritage who has not seen the luxuriant exuberance of Gilead, as well as the bare rocks of Judaea.” Lebanon is mentioned because of the cedar wood used in the construction of the palace. Solomon had called his private residence “the Palace of the Forest of Lebanon.”³ Some Bible scholars see the destruction of the cedar beams of the palace as symbolic for the killing of Judah’s kings and officials.

V.6 does not merely describe the palace as being like Gilead and Lebanon; God says: “Though you are like Gilead to me, like the summit of Lebanon.” This speaks of God’s love for the place and the deep emotions He experiences in seeing it destroyed. God’s judgment over sin hits Him harder than it hurts the sinner. After all, God’s solution to man’s sin problem was in the death of His own Son.

Vv.8 and 9 are a direct quotation of Moses’ words in Deuteronomy: “All the nations will ask: ‘Why has the Lord done this to this land? Why this fierce, burning anger?’ And the answer will be: ‘It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt.’”⁴ Quoting Calvin, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “The Gentile nations, more intelligent than you, shall understand that which ye do not—namely, that this city is a spectacle of God’s vengeance.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: “This king, otherwise known as Jehoahaz, a name probably adopted on his accession, was one of Josiah’s sons, succeeding after 609 BC when Josiah was killed at Megiddo. He reigned for three months before being deposed by Necho, was taken to Riblah and then to Egypt, where he eventually died (cf. 2 Ki. 23:33f.; 2 Ch. 36:4). He was the first leader of Judah to die in exile, and was told not to mourn for his father but rather for his own fate and that of his kingdom.”

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1. 1 Kings 6:38-7:1
 2. Heb. 6:13
 3. I Kings 7:2
 4. Deut. 29:24,25

There is, evidently, a good deal of irony in the use of the name Shallum. The original Shallum was a king of the northern kingdom of Israel. We read of him: “Shallum son of Jabesh became king in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah, and he reigned in Samaria one month.”¹ *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: “Shallum means retribution, a name of no good omen to him (Grotius); originally the people called him Shallom, indicative of peace and prosperity. But Jeremiah applies it in irony. 1 Chron 3:15 calls Shallum the fourth son of Josiah.”

Jeremiah’s words remind us of what Jesus said to the women who wept for Him when He carried His cross on the way to Golgotha: “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’”²

It is difficult for us to imagine what the crumbling of the kingdom of Judah must have meant to the people who lived at that time. They saw what was happening, hoping that God would do something to stall the collapse, but seeing that He did not. They did not understand why this happened to them and they were too blinded by their own sin to seek the cause within themselves.

We do not know whether Jeremiah moves here back and forth in chronology or whether he uttered these words before Zedekiah, giving the king a review of past history, as some Bible scholars assume. This does, however, not change the lesson to be drawn from it.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: “This man was the elder brother of Shallum, whom he succeeded, and was compelled to pay heavy tribute to Necho while the latter was preparing to attack the Babylonians in northern Palestine. Jehoiakim was an oppressive, covetous king who imposed heavy taxes in Judah (2 Ki. 23:35) and constructed elaborate royal buildings using forced labor. Unlike Josiah his father, Jehoiakim permitted pagan rites to flourish once again, including at this time those of Egypt (Ezk. 8:5–17), and in general behaved much as Manasseh had done (*cf.* 2 Ki. 24:3). Jeremiah condemns the king’s callous exploitation of his workers in defiance of the Torah (Lv. 19:13; Dt. 24:14; *cf.* Mal. 3:5). ... Jehoiakim thinks he is a king because he can surpass others in the amount of Lebanese cedar in his buildings. With this ostentation is contrasted the austere and moral way of life followed by Josiah, who was blessed by God primarily because of his spiritual qualities.”

Jehoiakim distinguished himself among the kings of Judah by using his office exclusively for his own enrichment. Jeremiah is the only source in Scripture who details his egoism. From *The Book of Second Kings*, we only learn that he paid taxes to Pharaoh Neco. We read: “Jehoiakim paid Pharaoh Neco the silver and gold he demanded. In order to do so, he taxed the land and exacted the silver and gold from the people of the land according to their assessments.”³ Jeremiah details that the king went well overboard in the taxing of his subjects when he realized that he could reap the benefits of it for his own good. God pronounces His “woe” over this man. Jehoiakim may have led a life of opulence while reigning over Judah, but at the end he experienced that “it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”⁴

The Hebrew of v.15 reads literally: “Shall you reign because you closed yourself in cedar?” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “These words imply that Jehoiakim was looking forward to, and taking measures to secure, a long continuance of power (compare Hab 2:9-13). If so, Jeremiah probably wrote this prophecy before Jehoiakim revolted (2 Kings 24:1); and it, therefore, probably belongs to the same date as Jer 36:30, written in the interval between Nebuchadnezzar’s first conquest of Jerusalem, and Jehoiakim’s rebellion, and when Jeremiah was out of the reach of the tyrant’s power.” The Hebrew word, rendered “closed,” is

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1. II Kings 15:13
 2. Luke 23:28-30
 3. II Kings 23:34
 4. Heb. 10:31

tacharah, which conveys the idea of the heat of jealousy, or to vie with a rival. The word is only found twice in Jeremiah, in this verse and in 12:5, where we read: “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you *compete* with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?” It seems that Jehoiakim’s greed came from a sense of insecurity, which was the result of his failure to trust the Lord. Jehoiakim compared himself with predecessors more prestigious than he and he tried to close the gap by living an opulent life; God compares him with his father and gives him failing marks.

Most Bible scholars believe that the words “Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!” and “Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!” were common mourning formulas used at that time. Some interpret them to be a reference to Adonis, the sun god, which would be an indication of how Israel’s culture at that time had been polluted by pagan practices.

Jehoiakim’s death and burial is foretold to be undignified and degrading. Jeremiah predicted: “He will have the burial of a donkey — dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.” We read nowhere how this prophecy was fulfilled. *Second Kings* merely reads: “Jehoiakim rested with his fathers.”¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* states about Jehoiakim’s miserable death, without even the honor of burial: “The prediction is repeated in ... Jeremiah 36:30, where the statement is made in plain language. At first sight it appears to conflict with ... 2 Kings 24:6, ‘So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers: and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead;’ but it is only appearance, and when we remember that the complete formula for describing the natural death of a king of Judah is, ‘slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David’ (... 1 Kings 14:31; 15:24; 22:50; ... 2 Kings 8:24; 15:7, 38; 16:20), and that the phrase, ‘slept with his fathers,’ is used of Ahab, who fell on the field of battle (... 1 Kings 22:40), we are naturally led to the conjecture that Jehoiakim did not die a natural death, but fell in battle in some sally made by the besieged.”

Some Bible scholars believe that the section of vv.20-23 still belongs to the condemnation of Jehoiakim, others that it introduces the part that refers to Jehoiachin. The various points of references given: Lebanon, Bashan and Abarim, give a survey of the entire land from north to east and south. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “Jeremiah names the chief ranges of mountains, which overlook the route from Jerusalem to Babylon, in regular order, beginning with Lebanon upon the north, then Bashan on the northeast, and lastly Abarim on the southeast.” Abarim was the place from which Moses surveyed the Promised Land before God took him away.²

Before Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, he conquered all the nations upon which Judah had counted for support, leaving her alone and isolated. Judah had felt secure as long as other nations were there as bumpers. She had counted on them for help in her opposition to Babylon instead of putting her trust in God alone as Hezekiah had done when Jerusalem was threatened by the Assyrians.³

“The shepherds” are the leaders of the people who were taken into captivity during Nebuchadnezzar’s first attack upon Judah. “You who live in ‘Lebanon,’ ” refers to the king and his family who lived in Solomon’s palace which was called “The forest of Lebanon.”

The words “you will groan when pangs come upon you, pain like that of a woman in labor” constitute an expression Jeremiah uses frequently.⁴ The pain that is part of the glory of womanhood becomes an insult if it is applied to males. Most men take offense when compared to women, even more so to a woman at the weakest point in her life. Jeremiah uses the affront to indicate that these strong men have lost all of their dignity because they failed to glorify the Lord.

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1. II Kings 24:6
 2. Num. 27:12; Deut. 32:49
 3. II Kings 19:14-19
 4. See Jer. 4:3; 6:24; 13:21; 30:6; 48:41; 49:22,24; 50:43.

Having said this, God launches all His ire upon Jehoiakin, who succeeded his father. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about him: “This man, named Jeconiah (24:1) and Coniah (here and in 37:1), became king of Judah after his father Jehoiakim died in December, 598 BC. He ruled for three months, after which he was deported to Babylon and held as a royal hostage. He was mentioned under the name *Ya’u-kin* in ration tablets dating between 595 and 570 BC which were unearthed near the Ishatar Gate in Babylon. A steward named Eliakim was appointed by the Babylonians to manage his estate in Judah while he was in exile. When Nebuchadnezzar II died, his successor released Jehoiachin from prison in 561 BC and allowed him to live in the royal palace (cf. 2 Ki. 25:27-30; Je. 52:31-34). Nothing can now prevent Jehoiachin’s exile, for in plucking off the *signet* God has rejected his leadership. The marking of property and documents by means of seals was an ancient Near Eastern practice, the signet ring in this case being perhaps part of the royal insignia (cf. Gn. 41:42; Est. 3:10).”

For a king who ruled only three months, one would expect that no verdict could be given about the character of his reign in such a short period. But Jehoiachin managed to incur the wrath of the Lord upon him in such a short time. We read about him: “Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months and ten days. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord.”¹ *The Hebrew Interlinear* calls him here *Coniah*. When Jeremiah calls him Coniah, he takes off the predicate “Ye” which would have linked his name to the Name of Yahweh. God changed his name, not by way of blessing as He did for Abram, calling him Abraham,² but in judgment.

The Hebrew of v.28 reads: “Is this man Coniah a broken despised idol? Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure wherefore they are cast out, he and his seed are cast out into a land which they know not?” The Hebrew word translated “idol” is *’etseb*, which has the primary meaning of an earthen vessel, a meaning that fits well with the rest of the verse. It also refers to labor pain as in the verse: “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly increase your *pains* in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children.’”³ Jeremiah applies here to Jehoiachin what he had earlier prophesied about the whole nation in the object lesson with the clay jar that he broke in front of the priests and elders at Ben Hinnom Valley.⁴

V.29 is the only place in Scripture with a three-fold denunciation: “Land, land, land.” It is an expression of extreme grief as in Jesus’ lament over Jerusalem: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”⁵ The tears over the land and over Jerusalem are God’s tears. Jehoiachin would be the last king of Judah, the last member of the house of David to sit on the throne of David. He marked the death of a dynasty. The throne of David would remain empty till the coming of the Messiah. As the angel Gabriel said to Mary: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Bible scholars have remarked that the reference to Jehoiachin’s offspring presents a problem, since at one place he is marked in most Hebrew manuscripts as being only eight years old when he became king.⁶ Elsewhere, however, his sons are mentioned as: “The descendants of Jehoiachin the captive: Shealtiel his son, Malkiram, Pedaiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama and Nedabiah.”⁷ Jeremiah’s prophecy also clearly

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1. II Chron. 36:9
 2. Gen. 17:5
 3. Gen. 3:16
 4. See Jer. 19:1-13.
 5. Matt. 23:37
 6. II Chron. 36:9 (*King James Version*).
 7. I Chron. 3:17,18

indicates that he had children, otherwise “for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah” would make no sense.

This section opens with the word “woe,” continuing the denunciation that ended the last chapter. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This ‘woe’ is a pendant to the ‘woe’ upon Jehoiakim in ...Jeremiah 22:13. The original form of the verse shows the strong feeling with which the prophet both wrote and spoke: ‘Woe the shepherds who destroy,’ etc. By ‘shepherds’ Jeremiah means rather the civil than the spiritual authorities, especially the kings.” Ezekiel and Zechariah would pronounce similar denunciations over the shepherds of Israel.¹ David was the first king of Israel to see the image of the shepherd as representing the relationship God had with him and he had with the people. It was his vision that must have inspired his chief musician Asaph to compose his “shepherd psalms.”²

Although this section opens with “woe” the actual message is one of comfort and blessing. It is true that the death of the dynasty, as symbolized in Jehoiakin, was a human tragedy, but it opened the door for Him who would be the “Good Shepherd.” Jehoiakin and some of his predecessors may have been like the thief and robber in Jesus’ parable, but they opened the door for Him who was to come, who would lay down His life for the sheep.³ David’s dynasty ended with the death of Jehoiakin and it came back to life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jehoiakin and Zedekiah were the shepherds who scattered the sheep of Judah in bringing about the Babylonian captivity. But from that time on God would take up the role of shepherd Himself. He would bring the survivors of the captivity back to the Promised Land. His intervention would go well beyond a physical restoration, as is evident from what Jesus would accomplish in becoming the good shepherd. In terms of renewal Judah’s return would not be the earth-shattering event that it is made out to be in Old Testament prophecy. The reality would be nothing less than resurrection from the death. As Jesus says: “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”⁴

The gathering of the remnant of the flock would also involve much more than the return of the few thousand from captivity at the order of Cyrus. It would entail the birth of the church, the body of Christ consisting of believers from among Jews and gentiles, and it will, at the end of time, become the conversion and restoration of Israel, as she recognizes her Messiah.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “As Messianic prophecy extended over many years, in which many political changes took place in harmony with these, it displayed its riches by a variety more effective than if it had been manifested all at once. As the moral condition of the Jews required in each instance, so Messiah was exhibited in a corresponding phase, thus becoming more and more the soul of the nation’s life, so that He is represented as the antitypical Israel (Isa 49:3).”

Isaiah introduced the thought that the Messiah would be called “a Branch,” a term Jeremiah picks up here and in a later chapter, and that was carried on by Zechariah.⁵

Actually, the Hebrew word Isaiah uses is not the same as in Jeremiah and Zechariah. The latter ones use the word *tsemach*, “a sprout,” but Isaiah *netser*, “a shoot,” emphasizing the greenness as a striking color. All of the New Testament theology of justification by faith is expressed in the Name given to the Branch here: *Yahweh-Tsidqenuw*, “The Lord Our Righteousness.” The root word in *Tsidqenuw* is *tsedeq*, “righteousness,” which is also found in the name Melchizedek. Some Bible scholars object to a New Testament interpretation of the Messiah’s Name in this verse, since in a later chapter, where Jeremiah repeats the phrase, the title is applied to the city of Jerusalem. We read: “In those days Judah will be saved

1. See Ezek. 34 and Zech. 11:15-17

2. Ps. 74:1; 80:1

3. See John 10:1,11.

4. John 10:10

5. See Isa. 11:1; Jer. 33:15; Zech. 3:8; 6:12.

and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.”¹ That objection, however, does not hold if we interpret it to mean that the Bride of Christ adopts the Name of her Bridegroom.

The words of v.7 constitute a manner of speech, a kind of oath used to affirm the truth of what one said. The Hebrew of “As surely as the Lord lives” reads simply: *Yahweh chai*, “The Lord lives.” Jeremiah repeats here what he had said in an earlier chapter.² According to R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, “His introductory formula, *Look the days are coming*, appears on 16 occasions in the book as a preface to a message of hope for the future.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “The wide dispersion of the Jews at the Babylonian captivity prefigures their present wider dispersion (Isa 11:11; Joel 3:6). Their second deliverance is to exceed far the former one from Egypt. But the deliverance from Babylon was inferior to that from Egypt in respect to the miracles performed, and the numbers delivered. The final deliverance under Messiah must therefore be meant, of which that from Babylon was the earnest.”

5. Denunciations of the prophets of Judah 23:9-40

9 Concerning the prophets: My heart is broken within me; all my bones tremble. I am like a drunken man, like a man overcome by wine, because of the Lord and his holy words.

10 The land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land lies parched and the pastures in the desert are withered. The [prophets] follow an evil course and use their power unjustly.

11 "Both prophet and priest are godless; even in my temple I find their wickedness," declares the Lord.

12 "Therefore their path will become slippery; they will be banished to darkness and there they will fall. I will bring disaster on them in the year they are punished," declares the Lord.

13 "Among the prophets of Samaria I saw this repulsive thing: They prophesied by Baal and led my people Israel astray.

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

15 Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty says concerning the prophets: "I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water, because from the prophets of Jerusalem ungodliness has spread throughout the land."

16 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.

17 They keep saying to those who despise me, 'The Lord says: You will have peace.' And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm will come to you.'

18 But which of them has stood in the council of the Lord to see or to hear his word? Who has listened and heard his word?

19 See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked.

20 The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly.

21 I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I did not speak to them, yet they have prophesied.

22 But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds.

1. Jer. 33:16

2. See Jer. 16:14,15.

- 23 *"Am I only a God nearby," declares the Lord, "and not a God far away?"*
- 24 *Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the Lord. "Do not I fill heaven and earth?" declares the Lord.*
- 25 *"I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, 'I had a dream! I had a dream!'*
- 26 *How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?*
- 27 *They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship.*
- 28 *Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully. For what has straw to do with grain?" declares the Lord.*
- 29 *"Is not my word like fire," declares the Lord, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"*
- 30 *"Therefore," declares the Lord, "I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me.*
- 31 *Yes," declares the Lord, "I am against the prophets who wag their own tongues and yet declare, 'The Lord declares.'*
- 32 *Indeed, I am against those who prophesy false dreams," declares the Lord. "They tell them and lead my people astray with their reckless lies, yet I did not send or appoint them. They do not benefit these people in the least," declares the Lord.*
- 33 *"When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you, 'What is the oracle of the Lord?' say to them, 'What oracle? I will forsake you, declares the Lord.'*
- 34 *If a prophet or a priest or anyone else claims, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' I will punish that man and his household.*
- 35 *This is what each of you keeps on saying to his friend or relative: 'What is the Lord's answer?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?'*
- 36 *But you must not mention 'the oracle of the Lord' again, because every man's own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God, the Lord Almighty, our God.*
- 37 *This is what you keep saying to a prophet: 'What is the Lord's answer to you?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?'*
- 38 *Although you claim, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' this is what the Lord says: You used the words, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' even though I told you that you must not claim, 'This is the oracle of the Lord.'*
- 39 *Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out of my presence along with the city I gave to you and your fathers.*
- 40 *I will bring upon you everlasting disgrace — everlasting shame that will not be forgotten."*

Vv.9 and 10 describe Jeremiah's emotions as he compares the reality of Judah's sinful condition with the attitude of her spiritual leaders. In his fellowship with God, he had learned to look at the state of the kingdom through the eyes of God and he was stricken with horror. This pain increased as he realized that, those who called themselves prophets, not only failed to see what he saw, but actually prophesied a message that fueled the fire instead of putting it out.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: "Jeremiah was troubled throughout his career by men who pretended to be true prophets but were not (Jer 27:16-22; 28; 29:8-9). They preached an easy message of 'peace in our time' and were no doubt popular. Here the prophet denounces them." The words 'peace in our time' are a reminder of the bogus agreement Great Britain's Prime Minister Chamberlain made with Hitler at the conference in Munich, a few months before the beginning of World War II. Coming out of the airplane, Chamberlain waved the paper of the contract before the eyes of the press and shouted: "Peace in our time."

The Hebrew of v.9 reads literally: “My heart is broken within me because of the prophets; my bones all shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man who is overcome because of wine, and because of the Lord, the words of his holiness.” This is not the kind of spiritual intoxication of which Jeremiah said earlier: “When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty.”¹ It is neither what the Apostle Paul says when he compares the fullness of the Holy Spirit with wine drinking: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.”² But this is the result of having the Word of God in his heart and seeing the behavior of men who pretend to have the same Word and who do not live up to its holy standards.

The Hebrew text of v.10 reads: “Because of swearing the land mourns.” Most Bible scholars, however, believe that the reading should be “because of the curse ...” The reference is probably to Moses’ words in Deuteronomy: “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse — the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. When the Lord your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses.”³ This corresponds to the words of Isaiah: “The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth’s inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left.” Daniel also refers to Moses’ curse in his prayer for the end of the Babylonian captivity: “All Israel has transgressed your law and turned away, refusing to obey you. Therefore the curses and sworn judgments written in the Law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against you.”⁴

The words “the land lies parched and the pastures in the desert are withered” may refer to the drought that was the topic of an earlier prophecy, which did occur during the reign of Jehoiakim.⁵

The adultery mentioned is spiritual, referring to idol worship as it was practiced again after the death of Josiah.

Beginning with v.11 the Lord takes over from Jeremiah and pronounces His verdict over both prophet and priest. The fact that idolatry was practiced inside the very walls of the temple is confirmed by Ezekiel, who describes his vision: “So I went in and looked, and I saw portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel. In front of them stood seventy elders of the house of Israel, and Jaazaniah son of Shaphan was standing among them. Each had a censer in his hand, and a fragrant cloud of incense was rising.”⁶

Both prophets and priests will end up in the kingdom of darkness whose emblems they had worshipped. Jesus said about this: “The subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁷

In vv.13 and 14 God compares the prophets of Judah to the ones in Israel who prophesied in the name of Baal and the latter come out better in this comparison. The northern kingdom of Israel had drifted into idolatry after Jeroboam I introduced the calves of Dan and Bethel, saying: “It is too much for you to go

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1. Jer. 15:16
 2. Eph. 5:18
 3. Deut. 11:26-29
 4. Dan. 9:11
 5. See Jer. 14.
 6. Ezek. 8:10,11
 7. Matt. 8:12

up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.”¹ Jeroboam kept the reference to Yahweh but he separated himself and his kingdom from the place of God’s revelation. Anyone who substitutes God’s way of worship for his own way will end up in the camp of God’s enemy. Judah, however, pretended to remain faithful to God’s revelation of Himself, having the temple and the Ark of the Covenant with God’s presence. But instead of serving Yahweh they worshipped God’s enemy.

The comparison God makes here between those who say they are the prophets of the Lord and those who professed to worship Baal reminds of us Jesus’ condemnation to the people of His day: “And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”²

When people stray from God’s revelation, it corrupts their moral behavior. We don’t know how much the people of Sodom and Gomorrah knew about God. The fact that the king of Salem, Melchizedek, was a priest of God Most high,³ suggests that there was a testimony of truth in the land. Yet, the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had drifted into immorality of which their homosexual lifestyle was emblematic. Whether Jeremiah’s text indicates that homosexuality was practiced in Jerusalem at that time cannot be stated for sure. But the people’s lifestyle that was the fruit of the prophets’ preaching had evoked the same disgust with God as Sodom and Gomorrah’s sin.

V.15 reads literally in Hebrew: “Therefore thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets; Behold I will feed them with wormwood and will make them drink the water of gall.” The Hebrew word for “wormwood” is *la`anah*, which comes from a word that is supposed to mean “to curse.” The first time that word is used in Scripture is in “Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such *bitter poison*.”⁴ Jeremiah uses it in Lamentations: “He has filled me with bitter herbs and sated me with *gall*.”⁵

In v.16, the Lord turns directly to the people of Judah, advising them not to listen to the message of peace the false prophets preached.

In Hebrew “those who despise me” is one single word *na’ats*, which has the meaning “to abhor,” or “to blaspheme.” It can also mean “to bloom,” as in the verse: “when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree *blossoms* and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.”⁶

The tendency to preach sermons that make people feel good is obviously not modern. It makes for popular preachers and it is pleasing to the public. It must have been fashionable in the days of the Apostle Paul, for which reason he wrote to the Galatians: “Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”⁷ To preach the Word of God, means to bring a sword that cuts deeply into the sinful human heart. As the author of the Hebrew Epistle states: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged

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1. I Kings 12:28
 2. Matt. 11:23,24
 3. Gen. 14:18
 4. Deut. 29:18
 5. Lam. 3:15
 6. Eccl. 12:5
 7. Gal. 1:10

sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”¹

Barnes' Notes asks the question: “How were the people to know the false prophets from the true?” The answer is that they could know but they were not interested in knowing. Everyone who is confronted with truth recognizes it as true, but that does not mean that one wants to act upon it. Who wants to submit to surgery if taking an aspirin makes you feel good? Continuing to deny the truth will eventual sear one’s conscience against it. Both the prophets and the audience followed the stubbornness of their own hearts.

The litmus test of prophecy is the prophet’s intimate relationship with God. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “A reason is given why the false prophets should not be heeded; they have not stood in the counsels of Yahweh—an image from ministers present, in a standing posture, at councils of Eastern kings - (cf. Job 15:8). The spiritual man alone has the privilege, as Abraham had.” Having said this, the commentary quotes the following verses to prove that God involves men in the execution of His purpose: “Then the Lord said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?’”² “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”³ “Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”⁴ “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”⁵ And: “ ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.”⁶

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v.18: “This verse is connected with ver. 16; it gives the reason why the false prophets were not to be listened to. None of them had been admitted to the secret council of the Lord; the interrogation is here a form of denial. ‘To stand in the council’ is not the same as ‘to sit’ (...Psalm 1:1); the latter phrase implies taking an active part in the consultations. It is specially applicable to the true prophets, according to ver. 22, and this, as we gather from other passages, in a twofold sense. Sometimes the prophets had visions, in which their inner eye was granted a sight of Jehovah in consultation with his trusted servants (...Isaiah 6:1, comp. 8; ...1 Kings 22:19); and the words of Eliphaz, “Wert thou listening in the council of God?” (...Job 15:8), appear to be descriptive of a similar experience. ... Thus there is no hard and fast line between the experiences of the prophets and those of humbler believers. In so far as the latter are ‘disciples of Jehovah’ (...Isaiah 54:13), they too may be truly said to ‘stand,’ at least in the doorway, ‘in the council of Jehovah;’ just as a well-known collect inherited from the Latin Church beseeches that ‘by God’s holy inspiration we may think those things that be good.’ ”

Isaiah’s call teaches us that one needs the experience of forgiveness and cleaning before one can hear the voice of the Lord calling: “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”⁷ It was the unwillingness of the false prophets to confess their sin and accept grace that excluded them from the council of the Lord.

In an earlier chapter, God had pronounced judgment upon the false prophets, saying: “I did not send them, yet they are saying, ‘No sword or famine will touch this land.’ Those same prophets will perish by sword and famine. And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or

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1. Heb. 4:12
 2. Gen. 18:17
 3. Ps. 25:14
 4. Amos 3:7
 5. John 15:15
 6. I Cor. 2:16
 7. Isa. 6:1-8

their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve.”¹ In this chapter, the Lord calls this verdict upon the false prophets “the storm of the Lord” and “a whirlwind.” The Hebrew uses the same word for “storm” and “whirlwind.”

The words “In days to come you will understand it clearly” are given to the people as proof of the truth. Moses had issued warnings to the people regarding false prophets, saying: “A prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.”² Jeremiah would be justified by the events when Nebuchadnezzar came to take the people into captivity and burn Jerusalem and the temple, but then it would be too late. God would then hold the false prophets who had preached peace responsible.

V.22 suggests that anyone who desired would have been allowed to attend the Lord’s council. “The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them”³ makes the fear of the Lord the only condition.

The words “Am I only a God nearby and not a God far away” contain a warning to the false prophets that there will be no hiding place for them when the storm breaks loose. They treated God as a local deity instead of the Lord of heaven and earth. How different was their concept from David’s who wrote: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me, even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.”⁴

The words that have a negative content here would be a consolation for those who, like Daniel, would be taken in captivity.

The striking feature in v.23 is that the logical sequence seems to be reversed. If the point is made in v.24 that no one can hide from God, we would expect that God would say: “Am I only a God far away and not a God nearby?” The Hebrew word for “near” is *qarowb*, which refers to “near in place, kindred or time.” It applies to intimacy as well as to distance. We find it in the verse where Lot says to the angel that was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah: “Look, here is a town *near* enough to run to, and it is small. Let me flee to it — it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”⁵ And also in: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: “Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and *neighbor*.”⁶ The Hebrew word for “far away” is *rachowq*, which means “remote, literally or figuratively, of place or time.” We find it in the verse: “On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the *distance*.”⁷ And also in: “ ‘I have seen his ways, but I will heal him; I will guide him and restore comfort to him, creating praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel. Peace, peace, to *those far* and near,’ says the Lord. ‘And I will heal them.’ ”⁸

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1. Jer. 14:15,16
 2. Deut. 18:20-22
 3. Ps. 25:14
 4. Ps. 139:7-12
 5. Gen. 19:20
 6. Ex. 32:27
 7. Gen. 22:4

The emphasis in these verses seems to be more on time than on space. Time is contrasted with eternity, which is represented here as endless time. God created time and space for us to live in, but He does not live in time and space Himself; He is eternal. Since time is the only entity we know, we can only speak of eternity in terms of time. But that does not mean that eternity is simply endless time. What God seems to be saying here is, “you are time-bound creatures, I am eternal.”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary explains: “The design with which God here dwells on His omniscience and omnipresence too (cf. 1 Kings 8:27; Isa 66:1) is shown in v. 25. The false prophets went so far with their lying predictions, that it might appear as if God did not hear or see their words and deeds. The Lord exposes this delusion by calling His omniscience to mind in the words: I have heard how they prophesy falsehood in my name and say, I have dreamed, i.e., a dream sent by God, have had a revelation in dreams, whereas according to v. 26 the dream was the deceit of their heart – ‘spun out of their own heart.’ ”

The false prophets would introduce their prophecy with: “I had a dream! I had a dream!” Jeremiah repeats this mockingly. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Jeremiah mentions it as one of the marks of a false prophet that he appealed to his dreams (comp. Jeremiah 29:8); true prophecy contented itself with less ambiguous media of communication with the unseen world.” Dreams are mysteries of the human mind that have never been fully explained. The primitive tribes people we worked with in Indonesia believed that dreams were real experiences of the spirit that ought not to be ignored. They thought the spirit left the body during a dream and moved in another real world. It is true that God sometimes speaks to people in a dream. Joseph, both the Old and New Testament ones, received God’s communication that way.¹ Daniel received God’s revelation in a dream at least one time.² But since we have no control over what we dream, Satan can communicate to us in this way as well as the Holy Spirit.

In v.28 God asks the question: “For what has straw to do with grain?” This is not a question that requires an answer; it is a condemning statement, comparing false prophecy with true prophecy. The words remind us of the warning the Apostle Paul issues: “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”³ V.29 puts the matter in typical Hebrew fashion as a rhetorical question: “Is not my word like fire, and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?” The Word of God, the real prophetic Word, will devour the false prophecy like fire burns straw. The Word also has the power to break the hardest human heart. Those words have a redeeming quality; they spell salvation for whoever allows himself to be broken.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states the following in an “Additional Note on True and False Prophets: “Given two men dressed in similar clothing, each claiming to be God’s messenger and prefacing his remarks with ‘This is what God says,’ it must have been far from easy to decide from external appearances which person was proclaiming revealed truth. Closer observation, however, would have made the difference between true and false prophets apparent. Genuine prophets stood consistently in the spirit of the Mosaic law, exemplifying by their lives the ethos of the covenant relationship. Their inspired utterance formed an extension of the spiritual communion which they enjoyed with God, and His word in their minds became their word to society. Because of the corruptions of the day many of their pronouncements were highly critical, challenging people to return to the covenantal ideals of Sinai. The divine word within them was like a fire which consumed whatever was unworthy and made them persons of absolute integrity. False

8. Isa. 57:18,19
1. Gen. 37:5-11; Matt. 1:20; 2:19,22
2. See Dan. 7:1.
3. I Cor. 3:11-15

prophets, by contrast, were indistinguishable from the rest of society in the matter of personal character, being essentially frauds who profaned sacred things and perverted the divine word by making it appear ludicrous. Their dreams were false, they told lies, deceived their hearers, and were spiritually irresponsible because they were not subject to a positive ethos. They proclaimed what people liked to hear, not what God had to say to them, and they invariably brought a message which would quiet the conscience and give it a delusive peace. About this latter they seemed greatly concerned, since their own worldly interests flourished best in an undisturbed environment. However, they were thinking of peace merely as the absence of turmoil or social conflict, and not as the triumph of divine righteousness among men. So far from being models of spiritual integrity, the false prophets were hypocrites who compromised the moral ethos of the Torah at every turn while professing to be God's spokesmen to the nation. Absolute loyalty and obedience to the revealed will and word of the Lord was the ultimate criterion for the distinguishing between true and false prophets. The deficient spirituality of the latter led to an equally inadequate understanding of God's dealing with His people. Consequently their pronouncements were false because they did not appreciate the conditional character of Israelite covenantal traditions, and therefore they misread completely the contemporary political situation."

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary states about v.30: "I am against the prophets ... that steal my words - a two-fold plagiarism; one steals from the other and all steal words from Yahweh's true prophets, but misapply them."

The New International Version states that the false prophets "wag their tongue." *The New Living Translation* calls them "smooth-tongued" prophets. These prophets were emissaries of Satan's Ministry of Propaganda, who told their lies with such eloquence that they sounded like truth.

Three times in vv.30 and 31 God says: "I am against..." The Hebrew reads literally: "Behold, I am against..." making it obvious to everyone who cares to look. God demonstrates clearly His opposition against their plagiarism, their appeal to divine authority and their dreams.

There is in vv.33-40 a play-on-words in the use of the word "burden." The Hebrew word is *massa'*, which has the double meaning of "a burden" and "an utterance." In this text it is used both in the sense of a burden and an oracle. We find it with the first meaning in the verse: "If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its *load*, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."¹ The second meaning is found in: "The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh — an *oracle*."² *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines "oracle" as: "One held to give divinely inspired answers or revelations," or "an authoritative or wise utterance." Isaiah introduces it with the meaning of a vision: "An *oracle* concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw."³

Evidently, some people had mockingly asked Jeremiah about the message God had revealed to him, using the word *massa'* in its double meaning. To this God instructs Jeremiah to answer: "You are the *massa'* and you will be dumped and no longer be carried by Me." *The Living Bible* brings out the meaning clearly with the paraphrase: "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!' And as for the false prophets and priests and people who joke about 'today's sad news from God,' I will punish them and their families for saying this. You can ask each other, 'What is God's message? What is he saying?' But stop using this term, 'God's sad news.' For what is sad is you and your lying. You are twisting my words and inventing 'messages from God' that I didn't speak. You may respectfully ask Jeremiah, 'What is the Lord's message? What has he said to you?' But if you ask him about 'today's sad news from God,' when I have warned you not to mock like that, then I, the Lord God, will unburden myself of the burden you are to me. I will cast you out of my presence, you and this city I gave to

1. Ex. 23:5
2. Prov. 30:1
3. Isa. 13:1

you and your fathers. And I will bring reproach upon you and your name shall be infamous through the ages.”

6. The good and the bad figs 24:1-10

1 After Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and the officials, the craftsmen and the artisans of Judah were carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Lord showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the Lord.

2 One basket had very good figs, like those that ripen early; the other basket had very poor figs, so bad they could not be eaten.

3 Then the Lord asked me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?"

"Figs," I answered. "The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten."

4 Then the word of the Lord came to me:

5 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians.

6 My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them.

7 I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.

8 "'But like the poor figs, which are so bad they cannot be eaten,' says the Lord, 'so will I deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the survivors from Jerusalem, whether they remain in this land or live in Egypt.

9 I will make them abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing, wherever I banish them.

10 I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their fathers.'"

The time of this vision is after 597 BC, after Nebuchadnezzar had laid siege to Jerusalem and taken the king and a large section of the population into captivity to Babylon. We read the account in *First Kings*: “At that time the officers of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it, and Nebuchadnezzar himself came up to the city while his officers were besieging it. Jehoiachin king of Judah, his mother, his attendants, his nobles and his officials all surrendered to him. In the eighth year of the reign of the king of Babylon, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the Lord had declared, Nebuchadnezzar removed all the treasures from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace, and took away all the gold articles that Solomon king of Israel had made for the temple of the Lord. He carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans — a total of ten thousand. Only the poorest people of the land were left. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king’s mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans. He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.”¹

Those who remained in Jerusalem must have interpreted these events as favorable to them and bad for those who had been carried off. In this vision God shows Jeremiah that the opposite is true. The captives were the fortunate ones. They were the people God considered good enough to be saved. From other parts of Scripture we learn that Daniel and his friends and Ezekiel were among them.

Jeremiah’s vision resembles the vision God had given a few centuries earlier to Amos. We read in Amos: “This is what the Sovereign Lord showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. ‘What do you see, Amos?’ he

1. II Kings 24:10-17

asked. ‘A basket of ripe fruit,’ I answered. Then the Lord said to me, ‘The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer. ‘In that day,’ declares the Sovereign Lord, ‘the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies — flung everywhere! Silence!’ ”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this section: “The basic message was that the exiles would be restored, while those remaining in the land would be destroyed. The skilled artisans and construction workers were needed by Nebuchadnezzar to construct building in his imperial centers, thereby making them more splendid than their precursors. Ruins excavated from the Neo-Babylonian period (612-539 BC) show the remarkable architectural achievements of Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. ... The Judean leaders had been deported so as to remove potential trouble-makers. The early-ripening figs, maturing in June, were valued as a delicacy (*cf.* Is. 28:4; Ho. 9:10), and contrasted sharply with the rotten figs. They symbolized two classes of people: the good, who would turn penitently to the Lord (7), and the bad, who would continue in their old rebellious ways. The former were now in Babylon, shocked into repentance, and committed to the single-minded worship of God. They would thus receive divine blessing and experience the reversal of the threats of 1:10. The latter, who were at present in Jerusalem, would feel the full weight of divine anger because of their hopeless degradation. Like bad figs they would be thrown out for all to see. In this graphic vision Jeremiah shows that fellowship with God and the blessings of divine grace need have no connection with cultic forms, national institutions or geographical locations. Whether in or out of exile, those who seek God whole-heartedly will find Him (*cf.* Dt. 4:29ff.; Ps. 119:10; Mt. 7:7).”

Obviously, those who were in Babylon did not hear the message of Jeremiah’s vision. They felt themselves the rejected ones, being removed from the Land of Promise and the place of God’s revelation in Jerusalem. Their gloom would increase even more when Nebuchadnezzar returned to the city and destroyed it together with the temple. Yet, God would reveal Himself to some of the captives as He had never done to anyone else. Ezekiel’s’ visions of glory supersede anything any of the other prophets had ever seen.

The message was given to those who remained in the city, who considered themselves to be the lucky ones that were spared. The fact that God still spoke to them at this point constituted a ray of hope. Their opportunity for repentance had not yet passed.

The promise to the good figs, the people who had been taken into captivity, reached well beyond a restoration of previous conditions. They would not only return to the Promised Land, but the Lord would send the Holy Spirit to operate in them an inner regeneration, a new birth that would make them into spiritually changed human beings. Similar promises run like a golden thread through the whole Old Testament. Moses had said to the generation that entered the Promised Land: “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”¹ And Jeremiah follows this up with assurances of spiritual awakening and renewal, saying: “‘This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ‘No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”² And: “I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.”³

Ezekiel, speaking on the other side of the border, prophesied: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.”⁴ And: “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you

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1. Deut. 30:6
 2. Jer. 31:33,34
 3. Jer. 32:39

back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”¹

Yet, those who returned to Jerusalem at the end of the seventy year period of captivity gave little or no evidence of such spiritual transformation. Haggai complained about the selfish mentality of the returnees: “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘These people say, ‘ ‘The time has not yet come for the Lord’s house to be built.’ ‘ ’ Then the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai: ‘Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your paneled houses, while this house remains a ruin?’ Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’ This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the Lord. ‘You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house.’ ”²

This leads us to conclude that the actual fulfillment of this promise did not occur until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down upon Jesus’ disciples and the church was born.

Some of “the bad figs” would try to escape Nebuchadnezzar’s wrath by fleeing to Egypt. Jeremiah deals with this part of history later in his book. They too would be hit by the same curse that hit those who remained in the land. The fact that they would become “a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing” would be the fulfillment of Moses’ prophecy: “You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you.”³

7. Desolation is confirmed 25:1-14

1 The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

2 So Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem:

3 For twenty-three years — from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day — the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

4 And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention.

5 They said, "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever.

6 Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you."

7 "But you did not listen to me," declares the Lord, "and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves."

8 Therefore the Lord Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words,

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4. Ezek. 11:19,20
 1. Ezek. 36:24-28
 2. Hag. 1:2-10
 3. Deut. 28:37

9 I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the Lord, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin.

10 I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp.

11 This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever.

13 I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations.

14 They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands."

In introducing this section, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "This passage is dated 605 BC, the fourth year of Jehoiakim, in which the crucial battle of Carchemish was fought. The result of this was that the Egyptians were routed and Babylon incorporated Judah into her empire as a tributary (2 Ki.24:1). Earlier scholarly allegations of an anachronism in which the fourth year of Jehoiakim in verse 1 was equated with the third year of that same king in Dn.1:1 are now known to have been based on a misunderstanding of ancient Near Eastern methods of chronological compilation. In seventh-century Palestine, the accession year was counted as the first year of the reign, whereas in Babylonia the accession year was reckoned separately, being then followed by the first year of the actual reign. Jeremiah thus reckoned according to the current Palestinian method while Daniel followed that used in Babylonia."

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary observes: "All the discourses of Jeremiah delivered before this time contain either no dates at all, or only very general ones, such as Jer 3:6: In the days of Josiah, or: at the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim (26:1). And it is only some of those of the following period that are so completely dated, as 28:1; 32:1; 36:1; 39:1, etc. The present heading is in this further respect peculiar, that besides the year of the king of Judah's reign, we are also told that of the king of Babylon. This is suggested by the contents of this prediction, in which the people are told of the near approach of the judgment which Nebuchadnezzar is to execute on Judah and on all the surrounding nations far and near, until after seventy years judgment fall on Babylon itself."

Barnes' Notes adds: "It was immediately after the battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.) between Egypt and Babylon, and probably before Nebuchadnezzar and his victorious army appeared in Palestine, that Jeremiah delivered this prophecy (Jer 25), orally perhaps at first to the people, but soon afterward committed to writing; it formed part of Jehoiakim's scroll (Jer 36:29). It belongs to the year of Jeremiah's greatest activity, when he was using his utmost efforts to detach Jehoiakim from Egypt, and prevail upon him to accept frankly the position of a king subject to Nebuchadnezzar, not only as a matter of policy but of religious duty. It was this latter aspect of the appeal that made the king reject it. He burned the prophet's scroll, tried to slay the prophet, and heard the voice of God no more during the rest of his reign."

And *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This chapter may be illustrated by a comparison of it with Jeremiah 46. There Jeremiah exults over the destruction of a nation (Egypt) which was one of the chief enemies of God's people, and on hearing or reading the inspired eloquence of the prophet the heart of a Jew could not but be moved with the liveliest sympathy. But it is another strain which meets us in this chapter, and one which to a Jew would certainly neutralize the favorable feelings which prophecies like that referred to must have awakened. Here Jeremiah announces that the last moment of grace for Judah is past, and the time for judgment come. The long-suffering of Jehovah has been exhausted; the fall of the commonwealth cannot any longer be delayed. Such was the strange destiny of the prophet; he was sent to 'pull down' and 'to build,' but the destructive element (as ... Jeremiah 1:10 suggests) was largely predominant. Specially

predominant is it in this important chapter, in which the prophet begins to fulfill the mission to the heathen with which twenty-three years ago he had been entrusted. One by one, ‘all the nations’ directly or indirectly connected with Israel are called up to hear their punishment. There is no indulgence, no respite; only a gleam of hope in the promised final destruction of the tyrant-city Babylon (vers. 12-14). The prophecy falls naturally into three parts, vers. 15-29 forming the center. The date assigned to this chapter in the first verse is remarkable; it is the fatal year of the battle of Carchemish, which brought Syria and Palestine within the grasp of Babylon.”

Vv.1-6 contain Jeremiah’s personal testimony of the first twenty-three years of his life as a prophet. As R. K. Harrison observes in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*: “He was called about 626 BC and thus prophesied for almost twenty years under Josiah, followed by three months under Jehoahaz and three years under Jehoiakim. He was therefore in the middle of his career at this point, having spent over two decades urging the nation to spurn idolatrous worship and return to the covenantal ideals.”

Jeremiah mentions “all the prophets” that prophesied during those years mentioned. The Biblical record only mentions Zephaniah, who prophesied, among others, during the reign of Josiah.¹ But there were, evidently, others who did stand in the Lord’s council² and proclaimed God’s Word to the nation besides the numerous false prophets Jeremiah mentions.

In vv.7 and 8 God Himself addresses the people of Judah and Jerusalem through Jeremiah, offering them a last chance to turn from their idolatry and be spared judgment and destruction. The emphasis is on the fact that the gods they worship are the product of their own hands. Both Isaiah and Jeremiah used extreme sarcasm to describe the fabrication and worship of idols. Isaiah describes the process: “Half of the wood he burns in the fire; over it he prepares his meal, he roasts his meat and eats his fill. He also warms himself and says, ‘Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.’ From the rest he makes a god, his idol; he bows down to it and worships. He prays to it and says, ‘Save me; you are my god.’”³ And Jeremiah said: “For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter. Like a scarecrow in a melon patch, their idols cannot speak; they must be carried because they cannot walk. Do not fear them; they can do no harm nor can they do any good.”⁴

Jeremiah several times calls Nebuchadnezzar “God’s servant.”⁵ He was God’s instrument for the punishment of the nation, in the same way God used the Assyrians to accomplish His goal in the northern kingdom. God used the king of Assyria as His tool. But the Assyrians enjoyed their mission of destruction so much that they in turn incurred God’s wrath. Isaiah states: “Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood!”⁶

The ruin of the country is put before the people’s eyes as a last warning of things that can be avoided. Jeremiah had mentioned twice before the disappearance of joy under the symbol of a wedding. We read: “I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.”⁷ And: “For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Before your eyes and in your days I will bring an end to the sounds

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1. Zeph. 1:1
 2. See Jer. 23:22.
 3. Isa. 44:16,17
 4. Jer. 10:3-5
 5. Jer. 27:6; 43:10
 6. Isa. 10:15
 7. Jer. 7:34

of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in this place.”¹ The apostle John picks up this theme in Revelation, describing the fate of Babylon: “The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.”²

The epitome of joy is symbolized in the wedding night of newlyweds. When God created the first human couple, we read: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” And: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”³ The silencing of the voices of bride and bridegroom means the removal of the image of God, which leaves both man and the ground from which he was taken as a wasteland.

Vv.12-14 project light at the end of the tunnel, while at the same time issuing a warning to Babylon to avoid the same kind of judgment that met Assyria before. *Halley’s Handbook* observes about Jeremiah’s prophecy here: “The remarkable thing is that the exact duration of Babylon’s sway is foretold, 11-14; 29:10 ... an amazing prophecy. No possible way for Jeremiah to know that, except by direct revelation from God.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Widely different opinions are held as to the meaning of this prophecy. The most probable view is that ‘seventy’ is an indefinite or round number (as in ... Isaiah 23:17), equivalent to ‘a very long time.’ This is supported by the analogy of ... Jeremiah 27:7, where the captivity is announced as lasting through the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, his son, and his grandson — a statement evidently vague and indefinite, ... and in any case not answering to a period of seventy years. Besides, we find the ‘seventy years’ again in ... Jeremiah 29:10, a passage written probably eleven years later. Others think the number is to be taken literally, and it is certainly true that from B.C. 606, the fourth year of Jehoiakim, to the fall of Babylon, B.C. 539, sixty-seven years elapsed. But is it desirable to press this against the internal evidence that Jeremiah himself took the number indefinitely?” *Second Chronicles* quotes Jeremiah, giving the reason for the length of that period, stating: “The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.”⁴ The fact that Daniel, who lived at that time took Jeremiah’s seventy years literally, ought to be taken into consideration when debating the question as to whether the number is meant literally or symbolically. We read: “In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom— in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years.”⁵

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “The 70 years probably begin from the 4th year of Jehoiakim, when Jerusalem was first captured, and many captives, as well as the treasure of the temple, were carried away: they end with the first year of Cyrus, who, on taking Babylon, issued an edict for the restoration of the Jews (Ezra 1:1). Daniel’s 70 prophetic weeks are based on the seventy years of the captivity (cf. Dan 9:2,24).” More than a century earlier, when Babylon was still in its developing stage, Isaiah prophesied about it: “Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians’ pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah.”⁶ Jeremiah would pronounce God’s final verdict upon

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1. Jer. 16:9
 2. Rev. 18:22,23
 3. Gen. 1:27; 2:24
 4. II Chron. 36:21
 5. Dan. 9:1,2

Babylon at the end of his book, saying: “ ‘So Babylonia will be plundered; all who plunder her will have their fill,’ declares the Lord. ‘Because you rejoice and are glad, you who pillage my inheritance, because you frolic like a heifer threshing grain and neigh like stallions, your mother will be greatly ashamed; she who gave you birth will be disgraced. She will be the least of the nations — a wilderness, a dry land, a desert. Because of the Lord’s anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate. All who pass Babylon will be horrified and scoff because of all her wounds.’ ”¹

At the height of captivity, when Jerusalem was being ransacked, the temple destroyed and King Zedekiah taken away into exile, Jeremiah would pronounce the Lord’s final verdict upon Babylon. We read: “This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign. Jeremiah had written on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon — all that had been recorded concerning Babylon. He said to Seraiah, ‘When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud. Then say, ‘ ‘O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.’ ‘ ‘When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, ‘ ‘So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.’ ‘ ”²

It is obvious that the sequence of Jeremiah’s book has been changed by some later editor or editors, since “all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations” (vv.13,14) is a reference to we find in following chapters, not in the preceding ones.

III. A SUMMARY OF PROPHECIES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS 25:15-38

15 This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.

16 When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them."

17 So I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom he sent me drink it:

18 Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, its kings and officials, to make them a ruin and an object of horror and scorn and cursing, as they are today;

19 Pharaoh king of Egypt, his attendants, his officials and all his people,

20 and all the foreign people there; all the kings of Uz; all the kings of the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the people left at Ashdod);

21 Edom, Moab and Ammon;

22 all the kings of Tyre and Sidon; the kings of the coastlands across the sea;

23 Dedan, Tema, Buz and all who are in distant places;

24 all the kings of Arabia and all the kings of the foreign people who live in the desert;

25 all the kings of Zimri, Elam and Media;

26 and all the kings of the north, near and far, one after the other — all the kingdoms on the face of the earth. And after all of them, the king of Sheshach will drink it too.

27 "Then tell them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.'

28 But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: You must drink it!

6. Isa. 13:19

1. Jer. 50:10-13

2. Jer. 51:59-64

29 *See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the Lord Almighty.’*

30 *“Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: “The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth.*

31 *The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword,” declares the Lord.*

32 *This is what the Lord Almighty says: “Look! Disaster is spreading from nation to nation; a mighty storm is rising from the ends of the earth.”*

33 *At that time those slain by the Lord will be everywhere — from one end of the earth to the other. They will not be mourned or gathered up or buried, but will be like refuse lying on the ground.*

34 *Weep and wail, you shepherds; roll in the dust, you leaders of the flock. For your time to be slaughtered has come; you will fall and be shattered like fine pottery.*

35 *The shepherds will have nowhere to flee, the leaders of the flock no place to escape.*

36 *Hear the cry of the shepherds, the wailing of the leaders of the flock, for the Lord is destroying their pasture.*

37 *The peaceful meadows will be laid waste because of the fierce anger of the Lord.*

38 *Like a lion he will leave his lair, and their land will become desolate because of the sword of the oppressor and because of the Lord’s fierce anger.*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on these verses: “The intoxicating cup as a symbol of divine wrath occurs in Isaiah 51:17,22; Jeremiah 13;12f; 49:12; Zechariah 12:2, etc. The cup is given first to Jerusalem, then to the southern nations and finally to those in the north. All the peoples mentioned in chapters 46–51 are included here except Damascus. Some others involved were the king of *Uz* (20), homeland of Job (Jb. 1:1; cf. La. 4:21), located in Transjordan either at Haran, south of Damascus, or in the area between Edom and northern Arabia; *Dedan*, a tribe of merchants descended from Abraham and Keturah (Gn. 25:3); *Tema*, an Arab tribe living in the desert areas of Syria (cf. Gn.25:15), and *Buz*, a tribe descended from Nahor, Abraham’s brother (Gn. 22:21). According to ancient traditions the MT term *Sheshak* (26), RSV *Babylon*, was an *atbash* cipher for Babel. Divine wrath will fall inescapably on all these nations, beginning with God’s people Judah. None can refuse to drink the cup. Even Christ was obedient to the Fathers will in drinking the cup of penal suffering for man (cf. Lk. 22:42).”

The wrath of God is represented as a cup filled with intoxicating wine. The image is found several times in Scripture. Asaph used it in one of his psalms: “In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; he pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs.”¹ We find it in Isaiah in: “Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.”² And the Apostle John utilized it in Revelation in the same sense in: “A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: ‘If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb’”³ and: “God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.”⁴

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1. Ps. 75:8
 2. Isa. 51:17
 3. Rev. 14:9-11
 4. Rev. 16:19

The emphasis in the image is not so much upon the intoxicating effect of the drink, which would make it into a sedative that softens the pain, than upon the after effect, the hangover. This cup is the opposite of the “wine that gladdens the heart of man.”¹ It is rather as in: “You have shown your people desperate times; you have given us wine that makes us stagger.”² It is like the cup of hemlock that Socrates was given to drink, which killed him.

It is obvious that Jeremiah did not travel internationally to fulfill the command of the Lord given in v.17. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “It is too pro-sale to suppose either that Jeremiah made a journey to ‘all the nations,’ or that he actually went through the form of presenting the cup to the ambassadors who ... had come to Jerusalem to take measures against the common foe ... But the supposition arises ... out of an imperfect comprehension of the figure. It is not a cup with wine which the prophet receives from Jehovah, but a wine-cup filled with the wine of God’s fury, which wine (one may add) is no more a literal wine than the ‘sword of Jehovah’ is a literal sword. The ‘making all the nations to drink’ is simply a way of expressing the prophet’s firm faith that the word of Jehovah will not ‘return unto him void’ — that a prophecy once uttered must fulfill itself; and ‘sent me,’ in the last clause, merely means ‘entrusted me with a message’ (comp. ... Proverbs 26:6). That last reference reads: ‘Like cutting off one’s feet or drinking violence is the sending of a message by the hand of a fool.’ *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* adds: ‘As the wrath of God is no essence that may be drunk by the bodily act, so manifestly the cup is no material cup, and the drinking of it no act of the outer, physical reality. The whole action is accordingly only emblematical of a real work of God wrought on kings and peoples, and is performed by Jeremiah when he announces what he is commanded. And the announcement he accomplished not by traveling to each of the nations named, but by declaring to the king and his princes in Jerusalem the divine decree of judgment.’”

One could get the impression from the last words of v.18 that Jeremiah looks back upon the past when reporting these words. “As they are today” is the rendering of the Hebrew *hazeh kayowm*, which according to *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, “has here the force: as is now about to happen.”

Vv.28-30 suggest that Judah and the nations for which this message was meant would have the possibility to refuse to accept it. When God says: “Drink, get drunk and vomit,” He actually confirms a consisting condition in the same way as He hardened Pharaoh’s heart when Israel was still in Egypt.

Isaiah described Israel’s condition in similar words: “And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth. ‘Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.’”³

“You must drink it!” refers to the natural consequences of man’s sinful behavior. The only way judgment could be avoided would be through repentance and conversion. Those who refuse to change their behavior will suffer the consequences, like the person who does not stop drinking wine will end up with the hangover.

The words “See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished?” are addressed to the nations surrounding Judah. They remind us of Jesus’ words to the women who bewailed Him as He was on His way to be crucified: “For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”⁴

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1. Ps. 104:15
 2. Ps. 60:3
 3. Isa. 28:7-10
 4. Luke 23:31

“I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth” not only covers all of humanity but also all of time. These words make the Babylonian captivity symbolic of the final judgment upon all of creation, just as, at the end of time, Babylon becomes a symbol of all the crimes ever committed on earth.

Vv.30-38 continue the universal scope of judgment, taking Judah and Jerusalem as the epicenter of the destruction that constitutes God’s final verdict. Jeremiah uses the images of a roaring lion and of the harvesting of grapes as illustrations of judgment. Both pictures are found throughout Scripture. Amos made the roaring of the lion the theme of his prophecy: “The Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds dry up, and the top of Carmel withers”¹ and: “The lion has roared — who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken — who can but prophesy?”²

Isaiah depicts God’s judgment as the treading of a winepress in which the grapes of wrath are crushed. We read: “Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood splattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”³

Jeremiah uses the picture also in Lamentations: “The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah.”⁴

Joel says: “Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow — so great is their wickedness!”⁵

John uses it twice in Revelation: “Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, ‘Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.’ The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia”⁶ and: “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.”⁷

V.32 reads literally in the Hebrew text: “Thus says Yahweh Ts^abaa`owt, behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.”

1. Amos 1:2
2. Amos 3:8
3. Isa. 62:2,3
4. Lam. 1:15
5. Joel 3:13
6. Rev. 14:17-20
7. Rev. 19:11-16

The Hebrew word for “whirlwind” is *ca`ar*, which comes from a word meaning: “hurricane.” Jeremiah used it earlier in his prophecy against the false prophets, saying: “See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a *whirlwind* swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand it clearly.”¹ It is another picture of the wrath of God.

In the image of the grapes crushed in the winepress, Jesus Christ is the one who is doing the treading and also the one who is being crushed. As Isaiah says: “He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”² Jesus is also the one who stills the storm of God’s wrath, as symbolized in the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee.³

The gruesome description of dead bodies covering the whole earth, unburied and unlamented, ought not to be taken as a literal carnage such as the world has known in the two world wars that marked the twentieth century. The Apostle John gives us an even grislier portrayal in Revelation, which also gives us the key to understand what Jeremiah says. We read: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.’ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.” Those killed in the scene in Revelation as well as in Jeremiah’s picture are “killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse.” That is, they die a second death because of the Word of God spoken by Jesus Christ, the rider on the white horse, the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Although this may sound like a relief to us, it is not. Spiritual death is worse than physical death, although that may be difficult for us to imagine.

Vv.33-38 are addressed to “the shepherds” of Judah, that is the king and his minister and the priests. Ezekiel prophesied against the shepherd of Israel, saying: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.”⁴ God says here that the shepherds who slaughtered the choice animals for their own use will be slaughtered themselves. Their sins are catching up with them. Jeremiah uses again the image of pottery being smashed as in an earlier chapter.⁵ The purpose of this warning is, like in all announcements of judgment, that the people addressed would come to their senses and repent. The wailing is not for fate that is unavoidable but for sorrow over sin. Those who confess their

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1. Jer. 23:19,20
 2. Isa. 53:5,6
 3. Matt. 8:24-27; Mark 4:37-41
 4. Ezek. 34:2-6
 5. See Jer. 19:1-13.

sins and believe in the atonement God has provided for them, do not face judgment; they have “crossed over from death to life.”¹

IV. PREDICTIONS OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 26:1-28:17

1. The Temple address and its consequences 26:1-19

26 Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the Lord:

2 "This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the Lord. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.

3 Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.

4 Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you,

5 and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened),

6 then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.'"

7 The priests, the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speak these words in the house of the Lord.

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

9 Why do you prophesy in the Lord's name that this house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate and deserted?" And all the people crowded around Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.

10 When the officials of Judah heard about these things, they went up from the royal palace to the house of the Lord and took their places at the entrance of the New Gate of the Lord's house.

11 Then the priests and the prophets said to the officials and all the people, "This man should be sentenced to death because he has prophesied against this city. You have heard it with your own ears!"

12 Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard.

13 Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the Lord your God. Then the Lord will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you.

14 As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.

15 Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."

16 Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, "This man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

17 Some of the elders of the land stepped forward and said to the entire assembly of people,

18 "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah. He told all the people of Judah, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: "'Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.'

19 "Did Hezekiah king of Judah or anyone else in Judah put him to death? Did not Hezekiah fear the Lord and seek his favor? And did not the Lord relent, so that he did not bring the disaster he pronounced against them? We are about to bring a terrible disaster on ourselves!"

1. John 5:24

The fact that this chapter does not fit chronologically in Jeremiah's account has bothered some Bible scholars. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "The present position of the chapter is only surprising to those who assume that the works of the prophets were necessarily arranged chronologically. How many violations of chronological order meet us in other books, e.g. in Isaiah. It is only reasonable to expect similar phenomena in the Book of Jeremiah. To estimate the circumstances of the prophecy aright, we must remember that in Jehoiakim's reign a Chaldean invasion was the danger by which all minds were constantly preoccupied."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section with: "This chapter begins a record of various incidents in Jeremiah's career. With characteristic passion he promises the destruction of the Temple as the price of national disobedience. This inauspicious beginning to Jehoiakim's reign (609–597 BC) occurred in the presence of people from all over Judah."

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary observes: "In the discourse of ch. 7, where he was combating the people's false reliance upon the temple, Jeremiah had already threatened that the temple should share the fate of Shiloh, unless the people turned from its evil ways. Now, since that discourse was also delivered in the temple, and since vv. 2-6 of the present chapter manifestly communicate only the substance of what the prophet said, several commentators have held these discourses to be identical, and have taken it for granted that the discourse here referred to, belonging to the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, was given in full in ch. 7, while the history of it has been given in the present chapter by way of supplement ... But considering that it is a peculiarity of Jeremiah frequently to repeat certain of the main thoughts of his message, the saying of God, that He will do to the temple as He has done to Shiloh, is not sufficient to warrant this assumption."

Jeremiah frequently held discourses in the temple, and more than once foretold the destruction of Jerusalem; so that it need not be surprising if on more than one occasion he threatened the temple with the fate of Shiloh. Between the two discourses there is further this distinction: Whereas in ch. 7 the prophet speaks chiefly of the spoliation or destruction of the temple and the expulsion of the people into exile, here in brief incisive words he intimates the destruction of the city of Jerusalem as well; and the present chapter throughout gives the impression that by this, so to speak, peremptory declaration, the prophet sought to move the people finally to decide for Jahveh its God, and that he thus so exasperated the priests and prophets present, that they seized him and pronounced him worthy of death. - According to the heading, this took place in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim. The like specification in the heading of ch. 27 does not warrant us to refer the date to the fourth year of this king."

We do not know how much of the glory of the Lord was still evident in the temple in the days of Jeremiah. At the dedication of the temple by Solomon, we read: "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple."¹ This physical demonstration of God's presence cannot have been permanent, since shortly afterwards the priests were again able to carry out their duties. But the moment stuck in the people's mind and the Shekinah became synonymous to the temple building itself. Yet, the glory of the Lord remained in the temple, although only observable to some people under certain conditions. Isaiah, for instance, saw "the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple."²

Ezekiel described in great detail the vision he saw of how the glory departed from the temple building and moved out of the city of Jerusalem before Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed both the temple and the city. We read: "The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem, to the entrance to the north gate of the inner court, where the idol that provokes to jealousy stood. And there before me was the glory of the God of Israel, as in the vision I had seen in the plain. Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the

1. I Kings 8:10,11
2. Isa. 6:1

threshold of the temple. Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.”¹

This indicates that the glory of the Lord had been present ever since the moment the temple was dedicated, but it was only at certain specific occasions that people who were in a tuned-in condition were able to observe and experience this glorious presence and talk about it. For the rest of the people the building became the only point of focus. The condition necessary for becoming aware of God’s presence, confession of sin and receiving of forgiveness, such as Isaiah had experienced, was absent among the majority of the population.

This made Jeremiah’s prophecy, which suggested the possibility of the destruction of the temple, so utterly offensive to the people. History would repeat itself in Jesus’ day when He said to the people: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”² That statement became one of the main points of accusation against Jesus during the trial that led to His crucifixion.³

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about vv.1-9: “The nation is warned representatively that God will not hesitate to destroy city and Temple, however sacrosanct both are believed to be. Cf. 7:1–15, which is considerably sterner. In verses 7, 8, 11, LXX adds *false* to prophets, as the context clearly implies. After prophets (8) MT adds *and all the people*. As an immediate savage reaction to his predictions, Jeremiah’s death was demanded.”

The fact that so many people were present to hear Jeremiah’s preaching suggests that the occasion may have been one of the major feasts at which the population was required to travel to Jerusalem for the celebration.

The whole scene, the place, the content of the message and the people’s reaction, makes Jeremiah again an image of Jesus Christ, who promised to rebuild the temple of His body in three days.⁴

The people of Judah had not committed the sin of Jeroboam who disregarded the place of God’s revelation and chose two places in the northern kingdom where God could be worshipped.⁵ This meant that Jeroboam no longer believed that God had the right to decide where and how He should reveal Himself to mankind. Jeroboam did not initially commit idolatry, but in taking away God’s authority, his act amounted to idolatry.

The Judeans had exchanged the temple of the Lord for the glory of the Lord, also taking away God’s right to self-determination. They worshipped a building instead of the living God. The temple had become their house instead of the house of the Lord. That was the reason Jeremiah’s message hit them to the quick and they decided that he should be killed. In v.11 the accusation is widened from the temple to the city of Jerusalem. God is now no longer in the picture at all. The temple may have been the place where God lived, but Jerusalem was the place where they lived. The concept of their habitat being “the Promised Land,” the place God had given to them, the place God called “My rest,” was totally absent here.

The official trial for Jeremiah begins in v.10 when the officials from the palace arrive at the temple and take their seats at the temple gate where the important judicial matters were handled. *The King James*

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1. Ezek. 8:3,4; 9:3; 10:4,5,18; 11:22,23
 2. John 2:19
 3. See Matt. 26:60,61; Mark 14:58.
 4. John 2:19-21
 5. I Kings 12:26-39

Version calls them “princes.” The Hebrew word *sar* refers to “a head person of any rank or class.” Here they are obviously the judges.

The priests and the other false prophets brought in the official charges of treason against Jeremiah in the presence of the princes, the judges. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The priests could scourge a man etc., but could not then try him for his life, as the Sanhedrim subsequently did until the Romans deprived them of the power.”

Somehow Jeremiah’s defense appealed to the guilty conscience of council members. Jeremiah did not defend himself or take back any of his accusations against the people; he merely appealed to God for the authority of his message and indicated that he was willing to seal his obedience with his life. For people whose main goal in life had been to use their position to better themselves, Jeremiah’s sacrificial attitude pricked their conscience deeply. They realized that Jeremiah was willing to give his life for the cause if that would ensure their salvation. This turned the judges’ verdict and public opinion in favor of Jeremiah and he was declared to be not guilty.

No one living in the days of Jehoiachin (597 BC) had been alive during the reign of Hezekiah (726 BC). What the elders stated was a history lesson they remembered. Micah’s messages read: “Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, you rulers of the house of Israel, who despise justice and distort all that is right; who build Zion with bloodshed, and Jerusalem with wickedness. Her leaders judge for a bribe, her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money. Yet they lean upon the Lord and say, ‘Is not the Lord among us? No disaster will come upon us.’ Therefore because of you, Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble, the temple hill a mound overgrown with thickets.”¹

2. The fate of another prophet 26:20-24

20 (Now Uriah son of Shemaiah from Kiriath Jearim was another man who prophesied in the name of the Lord; he prophesied the same things against this city and this land as Jeremiah did.

21 When King Jehoiakim and all his officers and officials heard his words, the king sought to put him to death. But Uriah heard of it and fled in fear to Egypt.

22 King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan son of Acbor to Egypt, along with some other men.

23 They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people.)

24 Furthermore, Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah, and so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.

Following Jeremiah’s court case is a short parenthesis about a certain Urijah whose prophetic message had been similar to Jeremiah’s. When Urijah realized his life was in danger he fled to Egypt from which he was extradited. Bible scholars differ about the reason for the introduction of this information at this point.

Quoting Calvin, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* suggest that “The context ... implies rather that the words are the continuation of the previous speech of the elders. They adduce another instance besides that of Micah, though of a different kind, namely, that of Urijah. He suffered for his prophecies; but they imply, though they do not venture to express it, that thereby sin has been added to sin, and that it has done no good to Jehoiakim, for that the notorious condition of the state at this time shows that a heavier vengeance is impending if they persevere in such acts of violence.”

But *Barnes’ Notes* states: “This narrative of Urijah’s fate was no part of the speech of the elders, who would not be likely to contrast the behavior of the reigning king so unfavorably with that of Hezekiah. Moreover, it would have been a precedent, not for acquitting Jeremiah, but for putting him to death.

1. Mic. 3:9-12

Jeremiah, when he reduced the narrative to writing, probably added this history to show the ferocity of Jehoiakim, and the danger to which he had been himself exposed.”

The Pulpit Commentary opines: “Jeremiah, writing down his experiences at a later time, introduces the story of Urijah to show the magnitude of the danger to which he had been exposed. The notice of Urijah has an additional importance, as it shows incidentally how isolated a spiritual prophet like Jeremiah was, and how completely the order of prophets had fallen below its high ideal. We have no further knowledge of the prophet Urijah.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, adds: “This insertion was evidently the work of Baruch, and contrasted the fate of the two contemporary prophetic figures.”

One thing that is obvious is that Jeremiah would not have fared well had he been handed over to King Jehoiakim for judgment. The parenthesis emphasizes the wickedness of that king’s reign.

3. A prophecy uttered in 594 BC27:1-22

1 Early in the reign of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 This is what the Lord said to me: "Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck.

3 Then send word to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon through the envoys who have come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah.

4 Give them a message for their masters and say, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Tell this to your masters:

5 With my great power and outstretched arm I made the earth and its people and the animals that are on it, and I give it to anyone I please.

6 Now I will hand all your countries over to my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; I will make even the wild animals subject to him.

7 All nations will serve him and his son and his grandson until the time for his land comes; then many nations and great kings will subjugate him.

8 " "If, however, any nation or kingdom will not serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon or bow its neck under his yoke, I will punish that nation with the sword, famine and plague, declares the Lord, until I destroy it by his hand.

9 So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon.'

10 They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you far from your lands; I will banish you and you will perish.

11 But if any nation will bow its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, I will let that nation remain in its own land to till it and to live there, declares the Lord." "

12 I gave the same message to Zedekiah king of Judah. I said, "Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live.

13 Why will you and your people die by the sword, famine and plague with which the Lord has threatened any nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?

14 Do not listen to the words of the prophets who say to you, 'You will not serve the king of Babylon,' for they are prophesying lies to you.

15 'I have not sent them,' declares the Lord. 'They are prophesying lies in my name. Therefore, I will banish you and you will perish, both you and the prophets who prophesy to you.'"

16 Then I said to the priests and all these people, "This is what the Lord says: Do not listen to the prophets who say, 'Very soon now the articles from the Lord's house will be brought back from Babylon.' They are prophesying lies to you.

17 Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin?

18 If they are prophets and have the word of the Lord, let them plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon.

19 For this is what the Lord Almighty says about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other furnishings that are left in this city,

20 which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem —

21 yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem:

22 ‘They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,’ declares the Lord. ‘Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.’”

The Pulpit Commentary, in introducing this chapter, states: “This and the two following chapters are closely connected. They all relate to the early part of the reign of Zedekiah, and contain warnings arising out of the deepening gloom of the political horizon. It must, however, be noted that there is evidently some mistake in the first verse of Jeremiah 27., and also that the contents of Jeremiah 29. point to a somewhat earlier time than Jeremiah 27, 28. (viz. the first or second year of King Zedekiah). To understand the circumstances of Jeremiah 27., we must remember that Zedekiah had accepted the throne as the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar (... 2 Kings 24:17). The self-righteousness and formalism of the people, however, would not allow them to remain quiet under such a humiliation. Deuteronomy, it seemed to them, had promised success and prosperity to an obedient performance of the Law, and the priests and the prophets assured them that these conditions had been complied with. In the fourth year of Zedekiah (comp. ... Jeremiah 28:1) the popular discontent was still further stimulated by the presence of ambassadors from the neighboring nations, who had come to organize a common movement against the common enemy. Jeremiah believed that he could not give more forcible expression to the Divine warnings of which he was the bearer than by a symbolic act akin to that related of Isaiah in ... Isaiah 20:2. He appeared in some public place, where the ambassadors would be sure to pass, with a yoke upon his neck, and in this strange guise delivered an impressive exhortation to the foreign visitors. It would appear as if Jeremiah’s exertions on this occasion were successful, so far as Judah was concerned; for we are informed (... Jeremiah 51:59) that, in the fourth year of his reign, Zedekiah took a journey to Babylon, doubtless to renew his oath of fidelity to the King of Babylon. It is instructive to compare this chapter as given in the Hebrew Bible with the form in which it appears in the Septuagint. We must not too hastily assume that the Greek is incorrect, but examine in each case which form gives most force and expressiveness to the prophecy.”

A footnote in *The New International Version* also states that most Hebrew manuscripts have the name of Jehoiakim instead of Zedekiah in this chapter. The reference to the articles Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple to Babylon (v.16) indicates that this prophecy cannot be dated during the reign of Jehoiakim, who was taken to Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar looted Jerusalem the first time.¹ According to *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, Calvin believed that “Jehoiakim” was the true reading. We read: “The prophecy that follows was, according to this reading, given in the 4th year of Jehoiakim, 15 years before it was published in the reign of Zedekiah, to whom it refers; it was thus long deposited in the prophet’s bosom, in order that by it he might be supported under trials in his prophetic career in the interim (Calvin). But ‘Zedekiah’ may be the true reading.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains: “A powerful object-lesson is used to proclaim God’s will for neighboring nations, from which envoys had come to Zedekiah in hopes of forming an alliance against Babylon. The yoke of wooden bars laced together by thongs (cf. 28:1, 10, 12) was symbolic testimony to the hopelessness of trying to throw off the Babylonian yoke. ... One LXX MS omits

1. See II Chron. 36:5-7.

the enclitic *mem* ('them'), implying that only one yoke, worn by Jeremiah, was actually made, and that news of this was to be sent to those nations plotting revolt. Most probably this is what actually happened.”

It is easy to imagine what reaction Jeremiah's message would have upon those who heard him speak. He spoke while Jerusalem was hosting an international conference attended by the ambassadors of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon, and the city was buzzing with hope that an alliance with Judah's surrounding nations would form a solid block against the Babylonian threat. Doing what Jeremiah's words suggested would be the most unnatural thing imaginable under the prevailing circumstances.

Jeremiah introduces his prophecy with the Hebrew words “*Yahweh Tsabaa'owt, Eloheey Yisraa'eel*, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel.” To the ambassadors of the surrounding nations, Yahweh was merely Israel's local deity who had no jurisdiction over their countries. Added to this, Judah's king, Zedekiah, did not seem to take the message of his own God seriously, so why would they? And it would be the most unpatriotic attitude possible to submit to a Babylonian threat without offering resistance.

God tells these people by the mouth of Jeremiah the message that Israel was supposed to have exemplified throughout the ages, but never did, that God is the God of heaven and earth, the Creator of everything. There must have been among the pagan nations of the world at that time remaining traces of truth, an ancient belief in a Creator who was greater and above the local deities they tried to appease in their idol worship.

Jeremiah's anti patriotic message reminds me of a situation at the beginning of the Second World War when Hitler invaded the Netherlands, Belgium and France. One of Holland's former prime ministers, believed that the rise of Nazi Germany constituted a new condition that was permanent and that the Dutch ought to accept the new order and refrain from resistance. He wrote a booklet on the subject that met with an overwhelmingly negative reaction. The Dutch believed that Churchill's dictum, “We will never surrender,” was the way to follow. They were, of course, correct. But Judah and the surrounding nations were not.

As Creator, says Jeremiah, God has the right to do with His creation as He pleases. To organize a conference and discuss international political tensions without consulting the only one who has the power to do something about it, makes no sense. But that is how mankind operates. When God says that He is about to give Judah and her surrounding nations as a gift to Nebuchadnezzar, His servant, He does not mean that He takes pleasure in doing so, as if that pagan king's evil empire was what God wanted the world to look like. Ever since its inception, Babylon has been the archetype of rebellion against God.¹ Nebuchadnezzar obeyed the orders of his master, the prince of this world. But God used these evil powers to achieve His purpose of judgment. God's ultimate goal is that, in the words of the Apostle Paul, “men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him.”² Even in announcing this judgment, God shows that there will be light at the end of the tunnel, that Babylon's reign will not be everlasting, even as Satan's dominion will come to an end.

The devil's ministry of propaganda was working overtime by using its own prophets, diviners, interpreters of dreams, mediums and sorcerers, who proclaimed that no one would be the victim of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest. This campaign of misinformation served the purpose of lulling people to sleep so that when the day came, no one would be ready to face it. Satan's victims were being fattened for the slaughter and they had no idea what was in store for them.

God's punishment for refusing to submit to Nebuchadnezzar's rule would be destruction of the land and captivity for its inhabitants. Only those who accepted Babylon's hegemony would be spared. Ironically, those taken into captivity were the only ones who would survive, at least as far as Judah is concerned.

In vv.12-15 Jeremiah addresses the same message to King Zedekiah. Zedekiah had earlier submitted to Nebuchadnezzar. As a matter of fact he owed his rule to that king's intervention in Judean

1. See Gen. 10:9,10.

2. Acts 17:24-28

affairs. But in accordance with the purpose of the international conference that gathered in Jerusalem at that time, Zedekiah considered breaking the oath he had pledged in the Name of Yahweh.¹

Vv.16-22 are addressed to the priests and the general population of Jerusalem. *The Pulpit Commentary* remarks about these: “The last four verses of this section appear in a much shortened form in the Septuagint, and it must be admitted that the description is singularly lengthy. It is, therefore, quite conceivable that this is one of the cases in which the Hebrew text has been disfigured by willful interpolation. On the other hand, it is also possible that the description was filled out by an editor, e.g. by Baruch, conscientiously for the benefit of later readers.”

Nebuchadnezzar had taken some of the temple treasures when he took Jehoiakim into captivity,² but the other articles mentioned were left till the Babylonians returned and destroyed the temple. They actually carried off the bronze of the pillars which they had broken up, as well as the other valuable articles of gold and silver. In the last chapter of his book, Jeremiah records what the Babylonians did with the temple furniture they had left at their first raid. We read: “The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the Lord and they carried all the bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service. The commander of the imperial guard took away the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, dishes and bowls used for drink offerings — all that were made of pure gold or silver. The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable stands, which King Solomon had made for the temple of the Lord, was more than could be weighed. Each of the pillars was eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference; each was four fingers thick, and hollow. The bronze capital on top of the one pillar was five cubits high and was decorated with a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. The other pillar, with its pomegranates, was similar. There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; the total number of pomegranates above the surrounding network was a hundred.”³ The pillars were thus never returned, since that means that they would have had to be rebuilt.⁴ The other articles were returned at the time of Ezra. We read: “Also, the gold and silver articles of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, are to be returned to their places in the temple in Jerusalem; they are to be deposited in the house of God.”⁵

There is no record that states that the promise in v.22, that the heavy articles would also be returned to Jerusalem, was ever fulfilled. There may be a spiritual implication in this of the same kind as drawn by the author of Hebrews. Describing the articles inside the first chamber of the tabernacle, he says: “The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order. When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our

1. II Chron. 36:16

2. II Chron. 36:5-7

3. Jer. 52:17-23

4. II Kings 25:13-15

5. Ezra 6:5

consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!”¹ We could assume that, spiritually, the missing articles were returned, not at the end of the captivity, but when Christ accomplished the atonement of the sins of the world. Jeremiah did not really say that the time of their return was at the end of the captivity, but “they will remain until the day I come for them.”

4. Prophet against prophet 28:1-17

1 In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the Lord in the presence of the priests and all the people:

2 "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

3 Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord's house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon.

4 I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,' declares the Lord, 'for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.'"

5 Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord.

6 He said, "Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord's house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon.

7 Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people:

8 From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms.

9 But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true."

10 Then the prophet Hananiah took the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah and broke it,

11 and he said before all the people, "This is what the Lord says: 'In the same way will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon off the neck of all the nations within two years.'" At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.

12 Shortly after the prophet Hananiah had broken the yoke off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

13 "Go and tell Hananiah, 'This is what the Lord says: You have broken a wooden yoke, but in its place you will get a yoke of iron.

14 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will put an iron yoke on the necks of all these nations to make them serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and they will serve him. I will even give him control over the wild animals.'"

15 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies.

16 Therefore, this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord.'"

17 In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on the opening verses of this chapter: “In 594 BC Jeremiah had a personal encounter with a false prophet who was reassuring and consoling the people. LXX and MT diverge widely here, as elsewhere in the chapter. The former is terse and condensed, while the latter is more expanded in nature.” The ongoing confrontation between Jeremiah and the false prophets is here personified in this exchange with Hananiah. Jeremiah had a lot to say about false prophets, but this is the first time we meet one personally.

1. Heb. 9:8-14

Hananiah originated from Gibeon, which was one of the priestly cities.¹ He was probably, like Jeremiah, a member of the priest caste. As *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: “Apparently the event took place on either a new moon or a Sabbath, when the people would throng to the temple.”

Hananiah may have been preaching as Jeremiah appeared, wearing the wooden yoke described in the previous chapter. Hananiah not only predicted the return of the stolen temple articles, but also of King Jehoiakim. This may give us a hint that Zedekiah was not overly popular. He was, after all, Nebuchadnezzar’s puppet. Other references to this period indicate that Zedekiah may have been in Babylon at this time. We read: “This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign.”²

Jeremiah’s “Amen” to this message was obviously a sarcastic response. But this was the kind of sermon the people loved to hear. It appealed to their nationalistic feelings and it did not require any confession of sin or act of repentance. But it was not the Word of God. As a false prophet, Hananiah was one of Satan’s envoys.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states: “Not content with general predictions of peace, Hananiah predicts the return of the deportees and the treasure within two years. This specific prediction proves to be the means for discrediting him, for of course there was no such return. Fulfillment is a test of true prophecy (Deut 18:22). It is interesting to note that according to the recently published Babylonian Chronicle, Nebuchadnezzar was at this time busy putting down a rebellion in Babylon. Probably Hananiah’s friends among the deportees in Babylon sent this information to him, thus provoking his optimism to be specific.”

Jeremiah’s reply to Hananiah mentions the general character of prophecy, namely that it tends to be warning, more than reassuring. The fact that we live in a world that is in a state of rebellion against God means that there must always be a call to repentance. Also, war seems to be the “normal condition” in which mankind operates. Jesus warns us: “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.”³ The two World Wars of the twentieth century confirm this prediction. Jeremiah then warns Hananiah that the proof of truth of a prophecy is in the fulfillment of it. He may have thought at this point that Hananiah would live to see how wrong he had been.

Hananiah’s breaking of the yoke Jeremiah was wearing amounted to a physical attack. We may assume that Jeremiah would not meekly hand over the yoke, Hananiah must have torn it off. As Jeremiah had worn the yoke as an object lesson, so Hananiah uses it in the same fashion to demonstrate how God would break the power of Babylon, according to his prediction.

The text reads: “At this, the prophet Jeremiah went on his way.” We may assume he was rather shaken at this point. He needed some time to regain his composure, at which point the Lord spoke to him again. Jeremiah received two messages from the Lord for Hananiah, one regarding the latter’s prophecy and one personal. The first was that God would replace the yoke of Babylon, which Hananiah had broken symbolically and with such ease, with an unbreakable one made of iron. The second one was a death sentence for the false prophet. Moses had said: “But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death. You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.”⁴

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1. See Josh. 21:17.
 2. Jer. 51:59
 3. Matt. 24:6,7
 4. Deut. 18:20-22

The second part of v.14 reads literally in Hebrew: “and also the beasts of the field I have given him.” This is a puzzling statement. There is no indication that King Nebuchadnezzar possessed supernatural powers over wild animals. The Hebrew verb *nathan*, rendered “given” here, has a variety of meaning. It can mean “to give,” “to put,” “to make,” etc. We know from Daniel’s account that Nebuchadnezzar became like one of the wild animals, rather than ruled over them.¹ I wonder if that is what this prophecy refers to. On the other hand, there is David’s statement of amazement when he gazed at the evening sky and saw himself in the vastness of God’s creation, saying: “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.”² David’s poetic utterance may have become an idiom that Jeremiah used to say that God made Nebuchadnezzar “a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.”

In vv.15-17 Jeremiah pronounces God’s sentence over Hananiah. This prophecy gives the impression that Hananiah was not an illusionist; he knew that his prophecy was not divinely inspired. Yet, he preached it. We do not know how difficult it must have been for Jeremiah to pronounce this sentence upon his fellowman. When Ezekiel found himself in a similar situation and witnessed the death of Pelatiah, it upset him greatly.³ Four months later Hananiah died and Jeremiah had proved himself to be the Lord’s prophet beyond the shadow of a doubt.

V. LETTER TO THE DEPORTEEST IN BABYLON 29:1-32

1 This is the text of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the surviving elders among the exiles and to the priests, the prophets and all the other people Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

2 (This was after King Jehoiachin and the queen mother, the court officials and the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the artisans had gone into exile from Jerusalem.)

3 He entrusted the letter to Elasah son of Shaphan and to Gemariah son of Hilkiyah, whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon. It said:

4 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

8 Yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have.

9 They are prophesying lies to you in my name. I have not sent them," declares the Lord.

10 This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place.

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

1. See Dan.4.

2. Ps. 8:3-8

3. Ezek. 11:13

12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

14 I will be found by you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you," declares the Lord, "and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile."

15 You may say, "The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon,"

16 but this is what the Lord says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the people who remain in this city, your countrymen who did not go with you into exile —

17 yes, this is what the Lord Almighty says: "I will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I will make them like poor figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten.

18 I will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth and an object of cursing and horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I drive them.

19 For they have not listened to my words," declares the Lord, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the Lord.

20 Therefore, hear the word of the Lord, all you exiles whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.

21 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: "I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will put them to death before your very eyes.

22 Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'The Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.'

23 For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken lies, which I did not tell them to do. I know it and am a witness to it," declares the Lord.

24 Tell Shemaiah the Nehelamite,

25 "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You sent letters in your own name to all the people in Jerusalem, to Zephaniah son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the other priests. You said to Zephaniah,

26 'The Lord has appointed you priest in place of Jehoiada to be in charge of the house of the Lord; you should put any madman who acts like a prophet into the stocks and neck-irons.

27 So why have you not reprimanded Jeremiah from Anathoth, who poses as a prophet among you?

28 He has sent this message to us in Babylon: It will be a long time. Therefore build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce.'"'

29 Zephaniah the priest, however, read the letter to Jeremiah the prophet.

30 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

31 "Send this message to all the exiles: 'This is what the Lord says about Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, even though I did not send him, and has led you to believe a lie,

32 this is what the Lord says: I will surely punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his descendants. He will have no one left among this people, nor will he see the good things I will do for my people, declares the Lord, because he has preached rebellion against me.'"'

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this chapter with: “Despised and rejected at home, Jeremiah turned his thoughts to those distant brethren in captivity, whom he had already likened to ‘good figs, very good’ (... Jeremiah 24:3,5). He had heard with sorrow that they could not readily submit to their altered circumstances; Judah, with its consecrated associations, was still too near to them in spirit. Probably a rumor of the expected confederacy (... Jeremiah 27:3) had troubled their minds, and the discontent was increased by the pernicious discourses of prophets and soothsayers similar to that Hananiah of whom we have just

heard. Two of these in particular are mentioned, and a terrible fate is held out to them. The appendix (vers. 24-32) deals with another prophet of the same type, who had not, indeed, offended so deeply as his companions, but had stirred up those at home to persecute Jeremiah in revenge for the preceding letter. The chapter is evidently, what it professes to be, a letter, at any rate in substance. From the looseness of its structure (see especially on vers. 16-20) it has been thought to have been dictated, like those Epistles of St. Paul, of which it may be regarded as a precursor... The date seems to be a little earlier than that of the two preceding chapters (comp. ver. 2 with ... Jeremiah 24:1); the messengers in ver. 3 are therefore not to be regarded as Zedekiah's companions in the journey mentioned in ... Jeremiah 51:59."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* dates this letter in 594 BC. That makes this commentator disagree with the dating of *The Pulpit Commentary*. Harrison believes that the delegation accompanying Zedekiah were the actual carriers of the letter.

The first reason for Jeremiah's writing of this letter was God's revelation to him of the duration of the captivity. In an earlier chapter, Jeremiah had stated: "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. 'But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt,' declares the Lord, 'and will make it desolate forever.'"¹ The other was the fact that false prophets were active in Babylon as they were in Jerusalem, predicting a speedy return to the homeland.

On the words "the surviving elders" R. K. Harrison in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* observes: "It would be unnecessary to suppose that some of the elders had already been killed in Babylon for insurrection."

It is difficult for us to understand the depth of emotions that must have moved the hearts of most of the Jews who were taken into captivity. Those who had remained faithful to the Lord and not given themselves to idolatry, such as Daniel and friends, found themselves now removed from the place of God's revelation. David expressed this sentiment to King Saul when the latter searched for him and tried to kill him. David said to Saul, speaking about Saul's counselors: "They have now driven me from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, 'Go, serve other gods.' Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the Lord."² For the less faithful who had been taken into captivity, national pride would not allow them to live in Babylon as Babylonians. The amazing feature about Jewish identity throughout the centuries and worldwide, however, is that as they have migrated over the globe, some willingly, others forced, they have integrated into the society in which they live and yet preserved their Jewish identity. In some cases this has become the feeding ground for anti-Semitism.

The suggestion to build houses, plant gardens, establish a family and seek peace for the place of residence, means that the Jews were in captivity, but not in prison. These Jews were not in a Nazi-like concentration camp, an impression we may get when reading in the Psalms: "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us — he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks."³ That is not what the Babylonians did to the Judeans who were in Babylon; they had done that when they destroyed Jerusalem. The peace, the Jews were to seek for the city in which they lived was *shalom*, which is safety, happiness, good health, prosperity and peace. In general the Jews in Diaspora have done this; they have taken hold of the financial institutions, bringing prosperity both to themselves and their surrounding. We must remember that those taken by Nebuchadnezzar were "the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans,"⁴ people who could promote the welfare of any place.

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1. Jer. 25:11-13
 2. I Sam. 26:19,20
 3. Ps. 137:8,9
 4. II Kings 24:14

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary comments: “The Hebrew exiles in Babylon were not slaves but deportees. Evidently they were free to live as they pleased. In time some became wealthy men of commerce, and others attained to high places at the court.”

The suggestion that they marry and start a family did not give them license to intermarry with the Babylonians, although some may have done so.

The mention of seventy years, however, makes the promise of return irrelevant for the generation that was taken into captivity. Those taken into captivity the first time were all adults. Even if they were young like Daniel and friends, they would be about ninety years old or more when their captivity ended. No good age to make any journey of hundreds of miles!

The phrase “Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have” strikes us as strange. The Hebrew reads literally: “The dreams which you cause to be dreamed.” This can mean their own dreams or the dreams of the false prophets. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “It appears there was a class of such persons, who not only had acquired a facility of dreaming themselves, but who undertook to interpret the dreams of others.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “The Latin adage saith, ‘The people wish to be deceived, so let them be deceived.’ Not mere credulity misleads men, but their own perverse ‘love of darkness rather than light.’ It was not priests who originated priestcraft, but the people’s own morbid appetite to be deceived; e.g., Aaron and the golden calf (Ex 32:1-4). So the Jews caused or made the prophets to tell them encouraging dreams.”

In vv.10-14 God reveals a promise that reaches well beyond the time, place and conditions of the Babylonian captivity. It speaks of “all the nations and places where I have banished you,” which widens the scope to all of Israel everywhere and, probably, at any time. It was the promise that inspired Daniel to begin his prayer of confession that opened the way for the initial return of the Jews to the homeland. We read: “In the first year of Darius son of Xerxes (a Mede by descent), who was made ruler over the Babylonian kingdom—in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the Lord given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”¹

V.11 reads literally in Hebrew: “‘For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,’ says the Lord, ‘thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.’” The Hebrew word, rendered “thoughts,” is *machashabah*, which has the meaning of “intention,” or “plan,” but also of “artistry.” We find it, for instance, in the verse: “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts — to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”² This reminds us of Paul’s statement: “For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”³ *The New Living Translation* renders it: “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.”

God’s promise speaks of more than a physical return to a geographic place; it speaks of fellowship and intimacy with Him. The Hebrew word for “prosper” is *shalom*, which covers a whole gamut of meaning, from wellbeing, safety, happiness, welfare, prosperity to peace. The ultimate return to God’s Promised Land would be when people would call upon the Lord and pray to Him and seek Him with all their heart.

There is a textual problem in vv.10-20. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “Most of verse 14, and verses 16–20 are absent from LXX. The latter section may be dittography from 24:1–10, though the reason for such dislocation is far from clear.” *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: “Some eminent

1. Dan. 9:1-3
2. Ex. 31:2-5
3. Eph. 2:10

critics maintain that vers. 16-20 are an interpolation, and this view is certainly supported by the omission of these verses in the Septuagint. It must also in fairness be admitted that the natural connection of ver. 15 is with ver. 21, not with ver. 16. But it does not follow that vers. 16-20 are an arbitrary interpolation. They may be regarded either as a digression in the original letter, or as inserted by an after-thought when the substance of the letter was brought into its present form.”

Satan had managed to infiltrate also those who were taken into captivity by raising up his own false prophets who prophesied the same untrue messages as those proclaimed by the false prophets in Jerusalem. The purpose, of course, was to cause confusion and to raise up false hope. The enemy has carried out this policy effectively throughout the ages, making it very difficult for those who do not know the truth to recognize it when they hear it. In our present time also the Gospel message is hidden in a cacophony of messages reaching from a doctrine of predestination that makes God into the Person who destines people to hell to a health-and-wealth promise that fails to deliver. Truth will only be recognized by those who are predetermined to obey. Jesus says: “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.”¹ Otherwise it will be difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the wheat and the tares.

The captives were still under the mistaken impression that they were the rejected victims and that those who remained in Jerusalem were the privileged ones. Jeremiah corrects this misconception. It is true that, when Jeremiah wrote this letter, the facts had not yet proven the truth of his predictions. But the few years that separated Nebuchadnezzar’s first raid upon Jerusalem and his return to destroy the city would soon be over and Jeremiah would be justified. Jeremiah’s prediction of the coming judgment over the king and those who had remained in the city served also as a warning to those in Babylon not to trust the prophets among them. What Jeremiah was saying was that this is what would happen to those who trusted false prophecy, they would become like the bad figs that could not be eaten. The picture refers to the earlier vision of the two baskets of figs.²

In vv.20-23 Jeremiah singles out two prophets who preached messages of false hope in Babylon: Ahab and Zedekiah and in v.24 and following he also mentions Shemaiah. The death sentence Jeremiah predicts about these two men would be further proof of Jeremiah’s divine calling. Their execution may have been the reason for Shemaiah to send a letter to Zephaniah, Zedekiah’s brother, (both were the sons of Maaseiah) ordering him and the other priests to put Jeremiah in prison. According to *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, “Nebuchadnezzar would be led by political reasons to punish these pretended prophets, as their predictions tended to make his Israelite subjects uneasy and disaffected, and might excite them to rebellion. He therefore slew them; two of them, it appears, he burnt alive, namely, Ahab and Zedekiah, who are supposed by the rabbis to be the two elders who endeavored to seduce Susanna, see Jer 29:23. Burning alive was a Chaldean punishment, Dan 3:6, and Amos 2:1. From them other nations borrowed it.”

We get the impression that God revealed the content of Shemaiah’s letter to Jeremiah, before Zephaniah, the priest, read it to Jeremiah. It was upon the reading of this letter that the Lord gave Jeremiah the prophecy regarding Shemaiah that neither he, nor his family, would participate in the return of the captives. Whether this means that the offspring of this man died out or whether they lost the vision that would inspire them to rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem, we are not told.

VI. MESSAGES OF CONSOLATION 30:1-31:40

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section with: “Chapters 30–33 interrupt the biographical material supplied by Baruch, and comprise a group of sayings about the restoration of Israel and Judah, a theme which had received some attention earlier in the book. However, to

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1. John 7:17
 2. See Jer. 24:1-3.

this point the tone of the prophecies has been extremely somber, since Jeremiah was proclaiming impending disaster as a punishment for national apostasy. Jeremiah is thus contrasted forcibly with the irresponsible light-hearted attitude of the rulers and the general populace. Yet these same chapters are also frequently called the ‘Book of Consolation’ because of the comfort and hope for the future which they embody once the penalty of exile has been imposed. Since most of Jeremiah’s optimistic statements occur in this section, it has been thought to comprise a collection of utterances from various periods of his ministry, and consequently there has been considerable disagreement on the provenance and date of the material. Some writers have held that it emerged just before the collapse of 587 BC, while others have suggested that certain aphorisms were late exilic in date and by someone other than Jeremiah. Theories of the latter kind, however, lean heavily upon critical reconstructions of Isaiah, with their entirely unwarranted assumptions and unproven conclusion. Chapters 30 and 31 are unquestionably genuine sayings of Jeremiah relating to the northern kingdom and reflecting the concerns of 3:6– 13. Chapter 32 and 33, written entirely in prose, seem to comprise three groups of utterances which were probably independent originally.”

1. Assurances of restoration 30:1-11

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.

3 The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will bring my people Israel and Judah back from captivity and restore them to the land I gave their forefathers to possess,' says the Lord."

4 These are the words the Lord spoke concerning Israel and Judah:

5 "This is what the Lord says: "'Cries of fear are heard — terror, not peace.

6 Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor, every face turned deathly pale?

7 How awful that day will be! None will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it.

8 "'In that day,' declares the Lord Almighty, 'I will break the yoke off their necks and will tear off their bonds; no longer will foreigners enslave them.

9 Instead, they will serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.

10 "'So do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel,' declares the Lord. 'I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid.

11 I am with you and will save you,' declares the Lord. 'Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished.'

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “This and the three next chapters form a kind of book in themselves, which contrasts admirably with ch. 27-29. In the latter Jeremiah aimed at casting down the delusive hope that the time of trial would soon be over and the captives restored; here he assumes that all are aware of the sad reality, and concentrates himself on the happier topics of comfort and encouragement. Ch. 30. and 31. shine out among all Jeremiah’s prophecies; there is a combination of softness and vigor which, even from a purely literary point of view, is most attractive. Strictly speaking, they ought to form but one chapter; they represent (as ver. 4 states) the revelation from Jehovah ‘concerning Israel and concerning Judah.’ It is, indeed, most touching, this yearning of the inspired prophet for the reunion of the two branches of the nation (comp. . . . Jeremiah 3:1-4:2). A ‘union in spirit’ was not enough for him; there must be a visible drawing together, to prove to all men that, as God is one, so his people is one. God’s love is imperishable, and, his election of Israel cannot be reversed. The very extent of Israel’s misery is a pledge that her God will not leave her to herself too long. And how is the restoration of Israel to be conceived? Surely nothing less than a new covenant will satisfy the conditions of the problem — a new covenant written in the heart.

Something akin to this encouraging prophecy may be traced here and there in earlier chapters (see ... Jeremiah 3:14-19; 16:14, 15; 23:3-8); but here the prophet is entirely absorbed in that glorious future which could alone save him from utter despondency.”

Although, as Bible scholars observe, this chapter opens a new phase of Jeremiah’s prophecy, there is an obvious connection with statements made in the previous chapter, where we read: “This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.’”

Bible scholars have disagreed about the time of writing of these chapters. Some believe that they date from the tenth year of Zedekiah’s reign when the city was under siege. Others are of the opinion that Jeremiah wrote this after the fall of the city.

The Hebrew word *shebuwth*, rendered “captivity” in v.3, can also mean “a former state of prosperity,” allowing a wider application to the fulfillment of this prophecy than the return to Jerusalem of the remnant of Judah alone.

Barnes’ Notes comments: “In Jer 30-39, not all written at the same time, are gathered together whatsoever God had revealed to Jeremiah of happier import for the Jewish people. This subject is ‘the New Covenant.’ In contrast then with the roles of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, we here have one containing the nation’s hope. A considerable portion was written in the 10th year of Zedekiah, when famine and pestilence were busy in the city, its capture daily more imminent, and the prophet himself in prison. Yet in this sad pressure of earthly troubles Jeremiah could bid his countrymen look courageously onward to the fulfillment of those hopes, which had so constantly in his darkest hours comforted the heart and nerved the arm of the Jew.”

There is a sense in which Jeremiah’s prophecy here constitutes “a song in the night,” similarly to what Paul and Silas did in the prison of Philippi. Both, for those under siege in the city, if that is the time of writing, as those already taken to Babylon, must have felt that circumstances could not be worse than they were. A feeling of despair may have taken hold of all involved, in spite of the vague hope held out by false prophets. Vv.5-7 describe the spirit of that day, comparing it to the pains of a woman in labor. The text reminds us of Jesus’ words to His disciples at the eve of His crucifixion: “A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”¹

The Hebrew of vv.4 and 5 reads literally: “And these are the words the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah. For thus says the Lord; we have heard a voice of trembling [of] fear and not [of] peace.” This is a reference to the message the false prophets had preached. We read earlier: “They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace.”²

The image of a man suffering labor pains is used frequently throughout the Bible. The Sons of Korah were the first ones to use it in one of their psalms: “Trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor.”³ Both Isaiah and Jeremiah use the picture frequently, as do other prophets.

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1. John 16:21,22
 2. Jer. 6:14; 8:11
 3. Ps. 48:6

There are some problems regarding the interpretation of the text that divide the opinions of Bible scholars. Judah and Israel are being treated as one nation, although they had had separated existences since the death of Solomon. Israel had ceased to exist as a separate nation for over one hundred years. Yet, the promise of restoration seems to apply to a restored kingdom under one king of David's dynasty. To make things more complicated, there is no record of any return from Assyrian captivity by any member of the northern kingdom.

Another question is whether the situation described in these verses as "a time of trouble for Jacob" refers to the fall of Jerusalem, or the fall of Babylon. The majority of Bible commentators lean toward the latter. *Barnes' Notes*, for instances, states: "The prophet places his hearers in the center of Babylon, and describes it as convulsed with terror as the armies of Cyrus draw near. The voice of trembling is the war-cry of the advancing host: while fear and no peace implies that even among the exiles there is only alarm at the prospect of the city, where they had so long dwelt, being destroyed." But, as *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: "It is also to be borne in mind that, throughout the whole prophecy, neither Babylon nor the king of Babylon is once mentioned; and that the judgment described in these verses cannot possibly be restricted to the downfall of the Babylonian monarchy, but is the judgment that is to fall upon all nations (v. 11). And although this judgment begins with the fall of the Babylonian supremacy, it will bring deliverance to the people of God, not merely from the yoke of Babylon, but from every yoke which strangers have laid or will lay on them."

Haley's Bible Handbook comments on chapters 30 and 31 by calling them "A song of restoration" saying: "For both Israel and Judah, with Messianic foregleams, commanded of God to be written, so that it could be kept to compare with the events of after ages."

The "time of trouble for Jacob," evidently, has a wider application than just the captivity and its end. The promise "no longer will foreigners enslave them" was not fulfilled even upon the return of the remnant from captivity. Even at the time of Jesus' birth and ministry, Israel was under the power of foreigners and the Jews at that time were still waiting for the restoration of the kingdom. Hence, the disciples' question: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"¹ The fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy is not seen in Scripture until John's vision in Revelation will be completed.²

The mention of David in v.9 is an obvious reference to the Messiah and the word "raise up" can only refer to the Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Vv.10 and 11 span the ages in which Israel was dispersed throughout the whole world. The return of the Jews to Palestine and the proclamation of the state of Israel in 1948 may be seen as a partial fulfillment of the promise, but it certainly is not complete. We can hardly say that present-day Israel has peace and security and that no one makes it afraid.

God says that He will not let His people get off the hook completely. "I will not let you go entirely unpunished" in Hebrew has the strange construction *naqah lo' naqah*, meaning "punished not punished." We find the same construction in the verse in which Abraham gives instructions to his servant who went to find a wife for Isaac: "If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be *released* from this oath of mine."³ For us who are atoned for by the death of Christ, this statement has a new meaning. We are released from our guilt of sin by being punished and yet not punished by a death that was not our own but that is imputed to us. We may apply the words of Amy Carmichael to ourselves:

"Upon a death I did not die,
upon a life I did not live,
I base eternity."

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1. Acts 1:6
 2. See Rev. 17-19.
 3. Gen. 24:8

2. The healing of wounds 30:12-17

12 "This is what the Lord says: "Your wound is incurable, your injury beyond healing.

13 There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you.

14 All your allies have forgotten you; they care nothing for you. I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many.

15 Why do you cry out over your wound, your pain that has no cure? Because of your great guilt and many sins I have done these things to you.

16 "But all who devour you will be devoured; all your enemies will go into exile. Those who plunder you will be plundered; all who make spoil of you I will despoil.

17 But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the Lord, 'because you are called an outcast, Zion for whom no one cares.'

Vv.12-15 contain God's diagnosis of Judah's spiritual and physical condition, which is the result of her sin. The diagnosis is that the nation is terminally ill; the only end of the sickness can be death. Since sin is the issue death is the end. "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."¹ God even admits that He is the author of Judah's suffering. He says: "I have struck you as an enemy would and punished you as would the cruel, because your guilt is so great and your sins so many."

Mankind usually looks at the world's trouble from a wrong angle. Judah thought her enemy was Babylon, which in a way it was. But Babylon was not the cause of Judah's trouble. Judah's real enemy was Judah. She found herself among a pack of wolves, not because she was a sheep but because she was a wolf herself. And God allows dogs to eat dogs. Had Judah come to her senses and confessed her sin and repented, as King Hezekiah and Josiah had done, God not would have treated her as an enemy.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary argues that the Hebrew word '*anash* means "desperate," not incurable; for the cure is promised in Jer. 30:17, 'I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds.'" In most cases in which the word is used, however, the context seems to make it "incurable." We read about the child that was born to David after his adultery with Bathsheba: "After Nathan had gone home, the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and *he became ill*."² And Job proclaims: "Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an *incurable* wound."³ The restoration God gives to people who are dying in their sin is not salvation from death but salvation by death, by means of a resurrection.

There is a textual problem in v.13. *The New International Version* reads: "There is no one to plead your cause, no remedy for your sore, no healing for you." *The New Kings James Version* reads: "There is no one to plead your cause, That you may be bound up; You have no healing medicines." The problem word is *mazowr*, which is derived from a word meaning "binding up," or "a bandage." The only other place where this word is found in the Old Testament is in Hosea, where we read: "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his *sores*, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your *sores*."⁴ R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, suggests the reading: "Nobody pleads the case for your healing: you have no restoring medicine."

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1. Rom. 6:23
 2. II Sam. 15:12
 3. Job 34:6
 4. Hos. 5:13

The word “allies” which *The New International Version* uses in v.13 seems too weak a translation for the Hebrew ‘*ahab*, which means “to have affection.” *The New Living Translation* renders the verse: “All your lovers—your allies—have left you and do not care about you anymore.”

God is speaking to Israel in these verses, repeating what she says about herself. Judah sees herself as incurable, and God agrees with the diagnosis. Quoting Calvin, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: “Thy cry is too late, because the time of repentance and mercy is past.”

Some Bible scholars believe that the description of Israel’s condition fits the captivity, but others see it as a picture of the siege of Jerusalem. The latter seems to be more fitting, since the condition of the people in Jerusalem was more desperate than for those in Babylon. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes: “The condition of the Jews in captivity was such as no human power could redress the grievances of; there they were like a valley full of dead and dry bones, which nothing less than Omnipotence can put life into. Who could imagine that a people so diminished, so impoverished, should ever be restored to their own land and re-established there? So many were the aggravations of their calamity that their sorrow would not admit of any alleviation, but they seemed to be hardened in it, and their souls refused to be comforted, till divine consolations proved strong ones, too strong to be borne down even by the floods of grief that overwhelmed them.”

The Hebrew word ‘*akal* in v.16 simply means “to eat,” as in “And the Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”¹ But Jeremiah gives it the more ferocious meaning of to devour the first time it occurs in his book. In that verse we read: “‘Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them,’ declares the Lord.”² The nations that attacked Israel were punished severely because they had eaten the Lord’s firstfruits. In the New Testament setting, those who are in Christ are considered to be God’s firstfruits. The Apostle Paul introduces the thought, saying: “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”³ This means that since Jesus rose from the dead, there will be a harvest of resurrection of those who believe in Christ. James pursues this, saying: “He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.”⁴ As Christians we are the objects of God’s special protection.

God will do to Israel’s enemies what they did to her. They will receive the treatment they meted out to others; they will be exiled and plundered like they plundered their victims. Then will begin the healing and peace that the false prophets had predicted falsely and prematurely. The false prophets had preached shortcuts to God’s plan of salvation and restoration. There can be no salvation without confession and repentance and, in the words of Paul and Barnabas: “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.”⁵

3. The restoration of Jerusalem 30:18-24

18 "This is what the Lord says: "I will restore the fortunes of Jacob's tents and have compassion on his dwellings; the city will be rebuilt on her ruins, and the palace will stand in its proper place.

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1. Gen. 2:16,17
 2. Jer. 2:3
 3. I Cor. 15:20
 4. James 1:18
 5. Acts 14:22

19 From them will come songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing. I will add to their numbers, and they will not be decreased; I will bring them honor, and they will not be disdained.

20 Their children will be as in days of old, and their community will be established before me; I will punish all who oppress them.

21 Their leader will be one of their own; their ruler will arise from among them. I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?’ declares the Lord.

22 “So you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

23 See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a driving wind swirling down on the heads of the wicked.

24 The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart. In days to come you will understand this.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section with: “From the ruins would emerge a city which in splendor would rival that of David and Solomon. God will then lend His protection to the economy, and bless the native ruler. This passage evokes the imagery of Isaiah 35, but in the language of Jeremiah.” Isaiah expressed this beautifully: “You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.”¹

V.18 reads in *The New International Version*: “I will restore the fortunes of Jacob’s tents.” The Hebrew word used is *shebuwth*, which has the primary meaning “exile,” or of “a former state of prosperity.” We find it used as such in the Psalm: “When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed.”² *The Revised Standard Version* renders it: “When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.”

We find in this verse the double contrasts of “tents” and “palace,” of “dwellings” and “ruins.” There is a difference of permanence in these opposites. The tent emphasizes the temporal character and the palace speaks of power and supremacy. Tents are for nomads, palaces for kings. The Incarnation has given a new meaning to these images. We find both the tent and the palace in John’s statement: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”³ The Greek word for “dwelling” is *skenoō* which is derived from a word, meaning “tent.” When God became Man in Jesus Christ, He became a nomad like us, at the same time demonstrating His divine glory and majesty. When at the end of the captivity, the remnant returned to Jerusalem, the city was rebuilt with the temple, but none of the glory predicted in Jeremiah’s prophecy was realized. There is no mention of the building of a palace in the days of Zerubbabel or Nehemiah. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “The prophet speaks of Judah as the type of the Church, with Immanuel as her king.”

There is in the songs of thanksgiving in v.19 also a note of confession. The Hebrew word *towdah* literally means: “an extension of the hand,” which can express either praise or confession. It is used in the description of the thank offering, as in: “If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this *thank offering* he is to offer cakes of bread made without yeast and mixed with oil, wafers made without yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil.”⁴ Ezra also uses it in the context of a confession: “Now make *confession* to the Lord, the God of your fathers, and do his will.”⁵ The

1. Isa. 62:3-5
2. Ps. 126:1
3. John 1:14
4. Lev. 7:12

Old Testament thank offering could not be brought until sins had been dealt with in the bringing of the guilt and sin offerings. The captivity did, in fact, not come to an end until Daniel had prayed his prayer of confession.¹

God promises glory to the ones who experience this restoration. The Hebrew word is *kabad*, which literally means: “to be heavy.” Paul uses this Hebrew idiom in the verse: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”² The meaning of this becomes evident when we compare those who receive God’s glory with the condition of the wicked. Psalm One expresses this in: “Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.”³ It is God’s glory that gives us the “mass” needed to withstand the storms of life and the attacks of the enemy.

Children will be born again in this restoration and the streets of the city will be teeming with them. There will again be a king, although it had been announced that none of Jeconiah’s descendants would inherit the throne of David.⁴ The reference, therefore, must be to the Messiah. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes here: “It is remarkable that no reference is made here to the Messiah, who, in fact, is not as conspicuous a figure in the prophecies of Jeremiah as in those of Isaiah. And yet even in Isaiah there is one striking prophecy in which the inspired seer uses language not (in the hands of a literalist) reconcilable with the prospect of the personal Messiah. The Messiah appears, as it were, in a lightning flash, and then disappears for a time. The prophecy of Isaiah referred to is ... Isaiah 32:1, 2 (comp. ... Jeremiah 33:17), in which the prospect of a truly God-fearing king, with princes of the same high character, entirely occupies the mind of the writer.”

The Hebrew text of v.21 reads literally: “And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them.” The Hebrew word, rendered “nobles,” “leader” in *The New International Version*, is ‘*addiyr*, which is derived from a word meaning “wide” “large,” or “powerful.” It is used of the sea in which Pharaoh and his army drowned. As we read in *The Song of Moses*: “But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the *mighty* waters.”⁵ The Hebrew word, rendered “governor” is *mashal*, which means “to rule.” We find it in the verse: “God made two great lights — the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light *to govern* the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, *to govern* the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.”⁶

Some Bible scholars limit the meaning of this verse to the Jewish nation, saying that the leader of the Jews returning from captivity would not be a foreigner, but a member of the Jewish race. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, for instance, states that the words are “applicable to Zerubbabel, or John Hyrcanus (hereditary high priest and governor), only as types of Christ (Gen 49:10; Mic 5:2, ‘Out of thee (Bethlehem-Ephrathah, in Judah) shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel;’ Rom 9:5), the antitypical ‘David’ (Jer 30:9).” But it seems preferable to give a wider application to the words and see in them a reference to the fact that the Incarnation made Jesus a member of the human race, in the sense in which the Apostle Paul uses it, saying: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time.”⁷

5. Ezra 10:11
1. See Dan. 9.
2. II Cor. 4:17 – *New King James Version*
3. Ps. 1:4
4. Jer. 22:29,30
5. Ex. 15:10
6. Gen. 1:16-18
7. I Tim. 2:5,6

Nothing in Jeremiah's prophecy here fits an application that limits itself to the return of Judah's remnant from Babylonian captivity only. In sending His own Son into the world, God intended the rehabilitation of the whole human race.

The second part of v.21 speaks about Jesus' unique intimate relationship with the Father, which caused Him to identify completely with Him to the point where He could say: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."¹ Although that relationship is unique, it is also representative for all. What the Apostle Paul says about Jesus' obedience can also be applied to His intimacy with the Father; it benefits us all. We read: "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."² It is because Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him that we have become His people and He is our God.

As some Bible scholars suggest, the theme of judgment in vv. 23 and 24 seem to fit better in the next chapter than at the end of this one. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "These verses occur in a form evidently more original in ... Jeremiah 23:19, 20. In all probability they were first inserted from memory in the margin, and then incorporated into the text at a time subsequent (how long subsequent we cannot say) to Jeremiah."

God's wrath is symbolized by a whirlwind. The Hebrew word *ca`ar* means "a hurricane." It was the means God used to take Elijah to heaven, as we read: "When the Lord was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a *whirlwind*, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal."³ It was also the storm that got the attention of Jonah and the sailors: "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a *violent storm* arose that the ship threatened to break up."⁴ Here it is a demonstration of God's wrath upon human iniquity.

V.24 suggests that the demonstration of God's wrath serves multiple purposes, affecting both believers and unbelievers, that is Judah and Babylon. For the Jews who were taken into captivity this would have been difficult to grasp. They could not see that total picture of what God planned to achieve in world politics, so they believed that they were the only ones for whom the storm was meant. "In days to come you will understand this" is an invitation to trust God that there is a purpose to what happened to them.

4. Restoration and the New Covenant 31:1-40

1 "At that time," declares the Lord, "I will be the God of all the clans of Israel, and they will be my people."

2 This is what the Lord says: "The people who survive the sword will find favor in the desert; I will come to give rest to Israel."

3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."

4 I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.

5 Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit.

6 There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim, 'Come, let us go up to Zion, to the Lord our God.'"

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1. John 14:9
 2. Rom. 5:18,19
 3. II Kings 2:1
 4. Jonah 1:4,12

7 This is what the Lord says: "Sing with joy for Jacob; shout for the foremost of the nations. Make your praises heard, and say, 'O Lord, save your people, the remnant of Israel.'

8 See, I will bring them from the land of the north and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor; a great throng will return.

9 They will come with weeping; they will pray as I bring them back. I will lead them beside streams of water on a level path where they will not stumble, because I am Israel's father, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.

10 "Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands: 'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'

11 For the Lord will ransom Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.

12 They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion; they will rejoice in the bounty of the Lord — the grain, the new wine and the oil, the young of the flocks and herds. They will be like a well-watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.

13 Then maidens will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.

14 I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the Lord.

15 This is what the Lord says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."

16 This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord. "They will return from the land of the enemy.

17 So there is hope for your future," declares the Lord. "Your children will return to their own land.

18 "I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.

19 After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'

20 Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord.

21 "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns.

22 How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The Lord will create a new thing on earth — a woman will surround a man."

23 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "When I bring them back from captivity, the people in the land of Judah and in its towns will once again use these words: 'The Lord bless you, O righteous dwelling, O sacred mountain.'

24 People will live together in Judah and all its towns — farmers and those who move about with their flocks.

25 I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint."

26 At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.

27 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals.

28 Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the Lord.

29 "In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

30 Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge.

31 "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

32 *It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.*

33 *"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.*

34 *No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

35 *This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the Lord Almighty is his name:*

36 *"Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me."*

37 *This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the Lord.*

38 *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate.*

39 *The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah.*

40 *The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."*

As R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: "The glorious hope of a restored nation of Israel and Judah is the main theme of this chapter." This chapter is one of the greatest in the whole book.

"At that time," or as the Hebrew states, "At the same time" is the time in which the people will understand the purpose of God's dealing, spoken about in the last phrase of the previous chapter. That moment of truth is the day in which God will be again "the God of Israel," that is of the one nation it was under David and Solomon. When the kingdom split in two after the death of Solomon, the northern kingdom broke its relationship with the temple in Jerusalem, the place of God's revelation on earth. This sin of Jeroboam would lead to outright idolatry. Disobedience to the will of God always leads to enslavement to Satan. The day of understanding will be the day in which Israel will again recognize God's right to choose how and where He wants to be worshipped. God can only be the God of Israel if Israel wants Him to be her God.

Reflecting on the fact that the ten tribes of the northern kingdom never returned from their Assyrian captivity and that Jeremiah predicts an apparent total restoration of the old Davidic kingdom upon return of Judah from the Babylonian captivity, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Both events are frequently thus connected together in the prophetic writings; and perhaps with this design, that when that which was nearest at hand should be accomplished, it might afford the clearest, and strongest, and most satisfactory kind of evidence that the latter, how remote so ever its period, would in like manner be brought about by the interposition of Providence in its due season. But though this prophecy relates wholly to one single subject, it seems naturally to divide itself into three distinct parts. The first part, after a short preface, in which the prophet is required to commit to writing the matters revealed to him, commences with representing, in a style of awe and energy, the consternation and distress which, in some future day of visitation, should fall upon all nations, preparatory to the scene of Jacob's deliverance, Jer 31:5-9. Israel is encouraged to confide in the divine assurance of restoration and protection, Jer 31:10-11."

It seems that Jeremiah mixes his metaphors in v.2, confusing the Babylonian captivity with Israel's enslavement in Egypt from which God delivered them by leading them into the desert and ultimately into the Land of Promise, called "God's rest." The mix-up is obviously intentional, making us see that the common experiences of hardship in "a time of trouble for Jacob"¹ cover most of Israel's history in the world, as well

as of all those who want to follow the Lord seriously. As the Apostle Paul states: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”¹

The Hebrew words *chen* in v.2 and *cheched* in v.3 are related in meaning, both having the connotation of “favor.” Abraham used the first when God visited him at Mamre, saying: “If I have found *favor* in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by.”² And Lot used the second when the angel told him to leave Sodom before its destruction, saying: “Your servant has found *favor* in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die.”³

“The people who survive the sword” (v.2) are obviously those who experience tribulation, facing death, but surviving. “The sword” symbolizes both war and persecution. It speaks of what man made of the world God created, not of what God made it for. Death is the extension of sin; it is separation from God.

If we try to limit the application of these chapters to a literal restoration and reunification of the kingdoms of Israel, we run into problems, mainly because there never has been a literal fulfillment of this prophecy. Some Bible scholars believe that the northern kingdom was restored in those who survived the fall of Samaria or those who joined the southern kingdom by moving to Jerusalem where the temple worship continued. We read about them in *Second Chronicles*: “Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of their fathers. They strengthened the kingdom of Judah and supported Rehoboam son of Solomon three years, walking in the ways of David and Solomon during this time.”⁴ It seems farfetched to see in this episode the realization of Jeremiah’s vision here, particularly since it refers to ancient history.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: “Jeremiah sees the captivity of Israel as yet another wilderness experience, as did Hosea,” referring to: “Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. ‘In that day,’ declares the Lord, ‘you will call me ‘my husband’; you will no longer call me ‘my master.’”

But the wilderness experience Jeremiah refers to is not a negative one. God meant for His people to “find favor in the desert.” When Israel left Egypt and spent time in the wilderness, God intended them to spend a two-year period of worship and fellowship, a time in which the moral and ceremonial law was given and in which the tabernacle was built. The fact that Israel spent forty years in the desert in a spirit of rebellion was certainly not God’s original plan for them.

Jeremiah evokes past history, the exodus from Egypt, God’s revelation of Himself at Sinai and the conquest of the Promised Land, to depict God’s plans for the future for His people. This principle is best worked out by the author of *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, when he says: “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, ‘So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’ And yet his work has been finished since the creation of the world. For somewhere he has spoken about the seventh day in these words: ‘And on the seventh day God rested from all his work.’ And again in the passage above he says,

1. Jer. 30:7

1. II Tim. 3:12

2. Gen. 18:3

3. Gen. 19:19

4. II Chron. 11:16,17

‘They shall never enter my rest.’ It still remains that some will enter that rest, and those who formerly had the gospel preached to them did not go in, because of their disobedience. Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’”¹

This chapter is a chapter of joy and celebration. God invites us to rejoice and praise Him because of His eternal love for us. “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness” is one of the most wonderful verses in the whole Bible. It is the Old Testament equivalent of John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

The Hebrew word rendered “everlasting” is *owlam*, which refers to “the vanishing point.” or “time out of mind.” It is that which is outside the realm of created time, that which belongs to God alone. The first time the word is used in Scripture is after the fall, when God said: “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live *forever*.”²

There are three important Hebrew words in v.3 that convey the concept of God’s love: *ahabah*, *ahab* and *checed*. The first two are obviously related. *Ahabah* is a feminine word, meaning “love.” Moses used it first in the verse: “The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord *loved* you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”³ It is used to describe the friendship between David and Jonathan in: “And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he *loved* him as himself.”⁴ *Ahab* is best defined in the verse in which God said to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you *love*, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”⁵ We also find it in: “Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he *loved* her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.”⁶ *Checed* is probably one of the most important words in the Old Testament. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, says about it: “The term *hesed*, rendered *faithfulness* (RSV) or *unfailing love* (NEB), is impossible to render by one word, but expresses the divine nature as exemplified in the Sinai covenant.” *The King James Version’s* rendering *loving-kindness* is probably the best that can be found. It is the vow with which God binds Himself to us as in the exchange of wedding vows between bride and groom during their ceremony. Interestingly, the first time the word is used is by Lot in the verse already quoted above: “Your servant has found favor in your eyes, and you have shown great *kindness* to me in sparing my life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll die.”⁷ David best describes the essence of it, saying: “Because your *love* is better than life, my lips will glorify you.”⁸

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on God’s everlasting love: “It is the happiness of those who are through grace interested in the love of God that it is an everlasting love (from everlasting in

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1. Heb 4:1-7
 2. Gen. 3:22
 3. Deut. 7:7,8
 4. I Sam. 18:3
 5. Gen. 22:2
 6. Gen. 24:67
 7. Gen. 19:19
 8. Ps. 63:3

the counsels of it, to everlasting in the continuance and consequences of it), and that nothing can separate them from that love. Those whom God loves with this love he will draw into covenant and communion with himself, by the influences of his Spirit upon their souls; he will draw them with lovingkindness, with the cords of a man and bands of love, to which no attraction can be more powerful.”

Chesed is the Old Testament counterpart of the New Testament *charis*, “grace,” which is the essence of the Gospel.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on: “With loving kindness have I drawn thee; rather, *do I continue loving kindness unto thee*. ‘To continue’ is literally, *to draw out at length*. The idea is the same as that in the great prophecy which follows that of the suffering Savior, ‘With everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee.’” The Commentary then quotes Isaiah, who wrote: “‘In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,’ says the Lord your Redeemer.”

It is God’s love that draws us to the Father in Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ own words: “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.”¹ This drawing is the key to resurrection from the dead. It is what makes the bride say to the bridegroom: “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame.”²

It is God’s love that urges Him to rebuild His people. The Hebrew word used is *banah*, which contains a creative element. The first time the word is used in Scripture is when God created Eve. We read: “Then the Lord God *made* a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.”³ It can also refer to obtaining children. Some of this is seen in what the Bible says about Cain: “Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain *was* then *building* a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.”⁴ Finally, it expresses an act of worship, as in the verse: “The Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your offspring I will give this land.’ So he *built* an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him.”⁵

God’s building up of His people is done in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah illustrates this with a reference to the historical event of the passing through the Red Sea, in which Pharaoh and his army perished but Israel went through and came out alive. The Exodus account states: “Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.’”⁶

At the time of Jeremiah’s prophecy the city of Samaria, capital of the northern kingdom, was a reminder of the death of the Davidic kingdom. David’s vision of making the twelve tribes into one body centered around the worship of God in Jerusalem had died after the death of Solomon. Not only was Jacob’s family broken up, the place of God’s revelation of Himself was no longer its central focus.

Jeremiah does not predict that Samaria shall be rebuilt as a capital city, but that it shall become a vineyard that produces grapes. It does not take too much imagination to draw a line from this prophecy to Jesus’ words to His disciples: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

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1. John 6:44
 2. Song of Sal. 8:6
 3. Gen. 2:22
 4. Gen. 4:17
 5. Gen. 12:7
 6. Ex. 15:20,21

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."¹

V.6 predicts the reversal of the sins of Jeroboam when he separated himself and Israel from the place of God's revelation and led his nation into idolatry.² And that which was only done by a few faithful in the north, who chose the worship of God above their national identity, would become an appeal to the whole nation.³

The Pulpit Commentary observes: "The termination of the schism between north and south will be shown by the anxiety of the Ephraimites ... to take part with their brethren in the festival of the new moon. It was the custom, at any rate in later times, to station watchmen at elevated points to give notice of the first appearance of 'the slender sickle, which shines so brightly in the clear Oriental heaven.' Let us go up. Not with reference to the physical elevation of Jerusalem, for the phrase, 'to go up,' is used of an army withdrawing from Jerusalem (... Jeremiah 21:2; 34:21). This seems to indicate that the term was sometimes used in a weakened sense, to which parallels might easily be given. These words, 'Arise ye, and let us go up,' etc., were, at a later period, the formula with which the leader of the pilgrims from any particular district summoned the members of his caravan to fall into the procession."

In vv.7-9 the Lord envisions what the group of pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem will look like and what they will do on the way. It is at the same time a prayer to be repeated by all the nations of the world who are addressed in the following section, vv.10-14. As stated earlier, Jeremiah's vision reaches well beyond the end of captivity and the return of a remnant from Babylon. It looks at the day of which John says: "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."⁴ John quoted Zechariah, who had said: "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son."⁵

The keyword in the phrase "O Lord, save your people" is *howshiyaaah*, which is a form of the word *yasha`*, "to be safe." We find it in the psalm verse: "O Lord, *save* us; O Lord, grant us success,"⁶ which the crowd quoted when Jesus entered Jerusalem, riding a donkey. We read: "The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest!'"⁷ That which was originally a prayer for salvation became a song of praise when Jesus entered Jerusalem, when the glory of God again filled the house of God.

One of the amazing aspects of these verses is that apparently, God waits for the prayers of the people in order to carry out His plan. He intends to save the remnant of Israel, but He wants the rest of the

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1. John 15:1-8
 2. I Kings 12:26-33
 3. II Chron. 11:16,17
 4. Rev. 1:7
 5. Zech. 12:10
 6. Ps. 118:25
 7. Matt. 21:9

world to ask for it. His kingdom will not come and His will will not be done on earth as it is in heaven if we do not pray the prayer.

The prayer for Israel's remnant implies recognition of God's plan of salvation. It presupposes that God has chosen a certain nation and certain individuals to reveal Himself on earth. To recognize Israel as the foremost of the nations means recognition as well as humility. It is the tendency of nations to see themselves as foremost in the world; to accept God's priority is a form of self denial.

V.8 describes the motley crowd of those God rescues: the blind and the lame, expectant mothers and women in labor. Not really the cream of the crop of world population. It is representative of the damage sin has done to the human race. There is life and hope in the expectant mothers and women in labor, but there is also part of the curse that says: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children."¹

There is in this return a strange mixture of joy and grief. Singing, shouting, weeping and tears are freely mixed. The prayer of those who are on the way home indicates a restoration of relationship. It is the thought of the prodigal son who said to himself: "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."² As in Jesus' parable, Ephraim, the prodigal son, becomes like the firstborn.

There is no biblical record of any return of the northern tribes. But, as *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests, there may have been a few who did return. We read: "With regard to the fulfillment of this prediction, we must remember that the remnant of the northern tribes whose faith was strong enough to induce them to profit by the edict of Cyrus, was smaller than that of the southern. Hence the outward signs of God's favor to Ephraim could not be so great as they would have been had the moral conditions of the fulfillment of the promise been more fully complied with."

Isaiah composed several songs that celebrate the return of God's people to the place of God's revelation, the greatest of which may be the one Jesus applied to Himself in His sermon in the synagogue of Nazareth: "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor."³ The context in which the New Testament places Isaiah's prophecy allows us to take Jeremiah's words also and apply them to more than a physical return of the captives to Jerusalem. These words of comfort apply to all who enter into God's rest and who have come to rest from their own sinful efforts. This is the Sabbath of which the author of The Epistle to the Hebrews says: "For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his."⁴

What would be the purpose of proclaiming this message to the "distant coastlands" (v.10), if it only pertained to the reversal of the fate of one particular group of people, numbering only a few thousand? The ransom of Jacob stands for the redemption of the whole human race.

The Hebrew word for "ransom" is *ga'al*, which describes the next of kin who has the right and obligation to redeem his relative, to buy back a relative's property, or marry his widow. God presented Himself as the *ga'al* when He said to Moses in Egypt: "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I

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1. Gen. 3:16
 2. Luke 15:18,19
 3. Isa. 61:1-3
 4. Heb. 4:10

will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment.”¹

Jesus revealed Himself as the *ga'al* when He said to His disciples: “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to *give his life as a ransom* for many.”² The author of Hebrews explains how Jesus accomplished being the *ga'al*, saying: “Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”³

The sons of Korah expressed the exuberance of those traveling to Jerusalem to meet the God at the place of His revelation. We read: “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. Selah. Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.”⁴ It is as God makes them “like a well-watered garden,” that they make the Valley of Baca into a place of springs as they pass through its arid area.

The victory dance described in v.13 will surpass everything this world has ever seen before. The celebration of the end of a war can be exuberant and wild. Having witnessed the end of World War II in Europe, I have vivid memories of my own reactions and those of my neighbors by hearing the news of Germany’s capitulation come over the radio. I can still see myself jumping three feet in the air with both feet. LIFE magazine captured the moment in a picture of a returning US soldier kissing a girl in the street. Such celebrations have been made throughout the ages; as long as there have been wars there have been victory dances. These are only a weak foretaste of the joys to come when God wipes away all tears from our eyes.⁵ Some of this victorious joy is experienced on earth as in heaven every time a sinner repents and turns to God.⁶

5. Lamentation and divine compassion 31:15-22

15 This is what the Lord says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more."

16 This is what the Lord says: "Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for your work will be rewarded," declares the Lord. "They will return from the land of the enemy.

17 So there is hope for your future," declares the Lord. "Your children will return to their own land.

18 "I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.

19 After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'

20 Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord.

21 "Set up road signs; put up guideposts. Take note of the highway, the road that you take. Return, O Virgin Israel, return to your towns.

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1. Ex. 6:6
 2. Matt. 20:28
 3. Heb. 2:14,15
 4. Ps. 84:4-7
 5. Rev. 7:7; 21:4
 6. Luke 15:10

22 How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? The Lord will create a new thing on earth — a woman will surround a man."

The Pulpit Commentary comments: From this glorious prospect Jeremiah's eye turns to the melancholy present. The land of Ephraim is orphaned and desolate. The prophet seems to hear Rachel weeping for her banished children, and comforts her with the assurance that they shall yet be restored. For Ephraim has come to repentance, and longs for reconciliation with his God, and God, who has overheard his soliloquy, relents, and comes to meet him with gracious promises. Then another voice is heard summoning Ephraim to prepare for his journey home. This verse is quoted by St. Matthew (... Matthew 2:17) with reference to the massacre of the innocents, with 'then was fulfilled'¹ prefixed. The latter formula of itself suggests that there was a previous fulfillment of the prophecy, but that the analogy of the circumstances of the innocents justifies — nay, requires — the admission of a second fulfillment. In fact, the promise of the Messianic age seemed in as much danger of being rendered void when Herod wreaked his fury on the children of Bethlehem, as when the tribes of Israel were scattered in exile."

We read about Rachel's death and her burial place when Jacob approaches the place where he grew up and from where he fled from his brother's wrath: "Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, 'Don't be afraid, for you have another son.' As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb."²

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia gives a lengthy description of Rachel's Tomb, of which we copy the following: "In Gen 35:20 we read: 'Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave: the same is the Pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day,' i.e. the time of the writer. Though the pillar, i.e. sepulchral monument, has long disappeared, the spot is marked until this day, and Christians, Jews and Mohammedans unite in honoring it. The present tomb, which, apparently, is not older than the 15th century, is built in the style of the small-domed buildings raised by Moslems in honor of their saints. It is a rough structure of four square walls, each about 23 ft. long and 20 ft. high; the dome rising 10 ft. higher is used by Mohammedans for prayer, while on Fridays the Jews make supplication before the empty tomb within. It is doubtful, but probable, that it marks the exact spot where Rachel was buried. There are, apparently, two traditions as to the location of the place. The oldest tradition, based upon Gen 35:16-20; 48:7, points to a place one mile North of Bethlehem and 4 miles from Jerusalem. Matt 2:18 speaks for this place, since the evangelist, reporting the slaughter of the innocents of Bethlehem, represents Rachel as weeping for her children from her neighboring grave. But according to 1 Sam 10:2 ff, which apparently represents another tradition, the place of Rachel's grave was on the 'border of Benjamin,' near Beth-el, about 10 miles North of Jerusalem, at another unknown Ephrath. This location, some believe, is corroborated by Jer 31:15, where the prophet, in relating the leading away of the people of Ramah, which was in Benjamin, into captivity, introduces Rachel the mother of that tribe as bewailing the fate of her descendants. Those that believe this northern location to be the place of Rachel's grave take the words, 'the same is Bethlehem,' in Gen 35:19; 48:7, to be an incorrect gloss; but that is a mere assumption lacking sufficient proof."

It is difficult to read this passage and not look at the application Matthew gives to it in connection with the birth of Jesus and the massacre of the infants in Bethlehem by King Herod. We read in Matthew: "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in

1. The Commentary gives here the Greek words in the Greek script.
2. Gen. 35:16-20

Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”¹

Matthew’s application of this prophecy to that atrocity evokes many questions that cannot easily be answered. If we believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible, we cannot question the accuracy of Matthew’s application. It means that God’s Holy Spirit bemoaned a demonstration of human cruelty that He foresaw five centuries before it actually happened. It is obvious that Jeremiah cannot have had this in mind when the Holy Spirit spoke through him at the time of the Babylonian captivity. He must have thought of those Nebuchadnezzar had carried away to Babylon and those who had been slaughtered by the same king at home. That is indeed the first application of this prophecy.

This prophecy is couched in poetry. We cannot assume that Rachel’s spirit literally came back to earth and expressed laments in the form of a mourning ritual such as was customary at oriental funerals. That would give endorsement to necromancy. There is a depth of inexpressible sorrow when a woman gives birth to a child at the cost of her own life. Some of this spirit of sacrifice is surely present in this passage. The tragedy increases even when the child, or children born at such cost, do not stay alive themselves, which is the scenario seen here. That means death twice over, second death.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary observes: “Rachel, who all her life had pined for children (Gen 30:1), and who died with ‘sorrow’ in giving birth to Benjamin, so that she called his name Benoni, ‘son of my sorrow,’ (Gen 35:18-19, margin; 1 Sam 10:2), and was buried at Ramah, near Bethlehem, is represented as raising her head from the tomb, and as breaking forth into ‘weeping’ at seeing the whole land depopulated of her sons, the Ephraimites. Ramah was the place where Nebuzaradan collected all the Jews in chains, previous to their removal to Babylon (Jer 40:1). God therefore consoles her with the promise of their restoration.” Quoting Bengel on Matthew’s reference to the verse, the commentary concludes: “A lesser and a greater event, of different times, may answer to the single sense of one passage of Scripture, until the prophecy is exhausted.”

The recalling of Rachel’s suffering, both in life and death, in connection with the captivity, of both the northern and southern kingdom, gives enormous depth to this chapter. Rachel had only two children: Joseph, who is mentioned here in the name of his son Ephraim, and Benjamin. Ephraim was Joseph’s second son, whom Jacob blessed as if he were the firstborn.² God did to Joseph what He had done to his grandfather Isaac by choosing the second son over the firstborn. In her lament, Rachel bewails the death of both of her children.

Rachel’s grief is more than a mother’s heartache over the fate of her children; it is a ministry of prayer. God says to weeping Rachel: “your work will be rewarded.” Reading the story of conflict between Rachel and her sister Leah, we get the impression that it never rises above the level of jealousy.³ There was obviously a spirit of jealousy and Jacob’s family was highly dysfunctional. But God looked at it from above and in all things worked for the good of those who love Him.⁴ When Israel’s reached her point of deepest despair, God came to comfort and create beauty out of ashes.

We assume that Jeremiah was familiar with Hosea’s prophecies over Ephraim and the northern kingdom, because much of what we read in vv.18-20 reflects Hosea’s words: “What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears.”⁵ And particularly: “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my

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1. Matt. 2:14-18
 2. See Gen. 48:12-14.
 3. See Gen. 29:31-30:24.
 4. Rom. 8:28
 5. Hos. 6:4

compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man — the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes,’ declares the Lord.”¹

We come back to the fact that the Assyrian captivity into which the ten tribes had been led predated the Babylonian one by almost two centuries. It does not seem to make much sense to suppose that the people in Jerusalem in Jeremiah’s day would grieve over the splitting up of the kingdom, after they had lived as separate nations and even fought wars with one another for almost a millennium. It would be like in present day history Great Britain bemoaning the loss of the United States of America as one of her colonies.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments: “Ephraim is here represented as a son, not a virgin to whom Jahveh could pay suit. Hence we must take the expression in the sense of ‘speaking against’ some one. But what Jahveh says against Ephraim is no mere threatening by words, but a reprimand by deeds of judgment. The answer to the question is to be inferred from the context: If the Lord, whenever He is constrained to punish Ephraim, still thinks of him, then Ephraim must be a son dear to Him. But this is not because of his conduct, as if he caused Him joy by obedience and faithful attachment, but in consequence of the unchangeable love of God, who cannot leave His son, however much grief he causes his Father. ‘Therefore,’ i.e., because he is a son to whom Jahveh shows the fullness of His paternal love, all His kindly feelings towards him are now excited, and He desires to show compassion on him ... Under ‘bowels’ are included especially the heart, liver, reins, the noblest organs of the soul. The expression is strongly anthropopathic, and denotes the most heartfelt sympathy. This fellow-feeling manifests itself in the form of pity, and actually as deliverance from misery.”

The Matthew Henry’s Commentary adds: “Not only Judah, but Ephraim the ten tribes, shall be restored, and therefore shall thus be prepared and qualified for it, Hos 14:8. Ephraim shall say, What have I do to any more with idols? Ephraim the people, is here spoken of as a single person to denote their unanimity; they shall be as one man in their repentance and shall glorify God in it with one mind and one mouth, one and all. It is likewise thus expressed that it might be the better accommodated to particular penitents, for whose direction and encouragement this passage is intended. Ephraim is here brought in weeping for sin, perhaps because Ephraim, the person from whom that tribe had its denomination, was a man of a tender spirit, mourned for his children many days (1 Chron 7:21,22), and sorrow for sin is compared to that for an only son.”

Since it does not make much sense to look at this prophecy as applying to an existing condition in Jeremiah’s day, the application must be found elsewhere. Matthew Henry’s observation that “Ephraim the people, is here spoken of as a single person” may give us a clue as to how it can be applied. The Apostle Paul explains in his epistles that God considers mankind as a single individual by looking at one person who represents all. We read for instance: “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”² Thus we can see in Ephraim’s repentance what individual repentance is supposed to look like. It is this spirit of repentance, demonstrated in Daniel’s prayer at the end of captivity that brought the Babylonian captivity to an end. It is the same spirit of repentance that will allow God to receive His prodigal sons and celebrate their new-found life with them.

The Hebrew words for “road sign” and “guidepost” are *tsiyuwn* and *tamruwr*. *The King James Version* renders them “waymark” and “high heaps.” The first word is used in the story in which King Josiah went into Israel territory to pull down the reminders of previous idol worship. We read: “The king asked, ‘What is that tombstone I see?’ The men of the city said, ‘It marks the tomb of the man of God who came

1. Hos. 11:8-11
2. I Cor. 15:22

from Judah and pronounced against the altar of Bethel the very things you have done to it.”¹ The second word is only found in Jeremiah’s text here.

Here the call to pay attention to the road signs speaks about the attitude of the heart that seeks fellowship with God. This is expressed in the verse: “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.”² Haggai uses a similar expression for those who actually returned from the Babylonian captivity and lost their vision once they were home. We read: “Now this is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat, but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not warm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it.’ This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Give careful thought to your ways. Go up into the mountains and bring down timber and build the house, so that I may take pleasure in it and be honored,’ says the Lord. ‘You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away. Why?’ declares the Lord Almighty. ‘Because of my house, which remains a ruin, while each of you is busy with his own house. Therefore, because of you the heavens have withheld their dew and the earth its crops. I called for a drought on the fields and the mountains, on the grain, the new wine, the oil and whatever the ground produces, on men and cattle, and on the labor of your hands.’”³

The Pulpit Commentary states about v.21: “The ‘virgin of Israel’ is addressed. She is directed to mark out the road for the returning exiles. The command is obviously rhetorical in form; the general sense is that the Israelites are to call to mind the road so familiar to their forefathers, though only known to themselves by tradition. The word rendered ‘way marks’ occurs again in 2 Kings 33:17 and ... Ezekiel 39:15. It apparently means a stone pillar, which might be used either as a waymark or a sepulchral monument. The *high heaps* seem to mean much the same thing; ‘signposts’ would be a better rendering.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, adds to this: “Virgin Israel is addressed in verse 21 in the second person singular. Though she has had other masters, God still considers her to be His bride (cf. 31:3). Begin verse 22, *How long will you delay, apostate daughter?* (cf. 3:22). The innovation of a woman protecting a man describes the loving care with which a physically weaker partner surrounds and sustains the stronger one. In the new covenant the Lord descends to the level of His people, limiting Himself to the point where they can lay hold upon Him. The situation is described in Christ’s incarnation by the phrase ‘the Word became flesh’ (Jn. 1:14), whereby God became what we are in order to make us what He Himself is.”

V.22 has given Bible scholars a good deal of trouble in interpretation. What is the real meaning of “a woman will surround a man?” The Hebrew text reads literally: “For the Lord has created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man.” The Hebrew word rendered “compass” is *cabab*, which has various meanings, from “to revolve,” “to surround,” to “border.” The first time the verb is used is in the verse that describes the rivers that cross paradise: “The name of the first is the Pishon; it *winds through* the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold.”⁴ We also find it in the verse: “So God *led* the people *around* by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.”⁵ *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “This place has given much trouble to Biblical critics. By many Christian writers it is considered a prophecy of the miraculous conception of the holy virgin; but as I am sure no such meaning is in the words, nor in the context, so I am satisfied no such meaning can be fairly brought out of them.” The commentary points out that some scholars believe there is a copying error in the text and that it should read: “‘The wife shall return to her husband;’ alluding to the conversion of the Jewish people, called

1. II Kings 23:17
2. Ps. 84:5
3. Hag. 1:5-11
4. Gen. 2:11
5. Ex. 13:18

above a backsliding daughter. This makes a good sense; but I do not see why this should be called a new thing in the earth.” Another possible reading suggested is: “A weak woman shall repulse a strong or mighty man.” Clarke concludes by saying: “It is most likely a proverbial expression.”

The Pulpit Commentary suggests the meaning: “Instead of shyly keeping aloof, or worse (as hitherto), Israel, Jehovah’s bride, shall, with eager affection, press around her Divine husband. The phrase, however, is extremely difficult. Of other explanations, the most plausible philologically is that ... ‘a woman shall protect a man’ (comp. ... Deuteronomy 32:10). The part of a sentinel, pacing round and round his charge, seems most unfitted for a woman. When enemies are abroad, it is the men’s natural duty to perform this part for the women. But in the coming age, the country shall be so free from danger that the places of men and women may safely be reversed. But would a paradox of this kind be likely to be uttered in this connection? Surely a clearer statement would be necessary to remove the reluctance of the Israelites. Vers. 19, 20 suggest that Ephraim needed reassurance as to the attitude of Jehovah towards him. The promise of ver. 22, as explained above, would give precisely the needed strength and comfort.”

The New Living Translation renders v.22: “For the Lord will cause something new to happen— Israel will embrace her God.”

In spite of the above rejections, I favor the thought Jerome introduced and the early church fathers adopted, that this may be a prophecy regarding Mary’s conception of Jesus. That would definitely qualify as “a new thing” God created on earth.

6. The happiness of future days 31:23-30.

23 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "When I bring them back from captivity, the people in the land of Judah and in its towns will once again use these words: 'The Lord bless you, O righteous dwelling, O sacred mountain.'

24 People will live together in Judah and all its towns — farmers and those who move about with their flocks.

25 I will refresh the weary and satisfy the faint."

26 At this I awoke and looked around. My sleep had been pleasant to me.

27 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will plant the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the offspring of men and of animals.

28 Just as I watched over them to uproot and tear down, and to overthrow, destroy and bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the Lord.

29 "In those days people will no longer say, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

30 Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge.

Having dealt primarily with Ephraim, the northern kingdom, in the previous section, the Lord now turns His attention to Judah for whom this prophecy is really meant. There is no doubt left as to whether Judah will return from captivity; it is not “if,” but “when.” The One speaking is the Lord of hosts, *Yahweh Tsabaa`owt*, the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel. The way in which the promise is worded is interesting. It is given in the form of a blessing those who return will use for one another regarding the place of God’s revelation on earth. The Hebrew text calls the place “habitation of justice and mountain of holiness.”

Upon Judah’s return, the prophet Zechariah uttered a similar prophecy, indicating that Mount Zion in Jerusalem is meant. We read: “This is what the Lord says: ‘I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the

Holy Mountain.”¹ Isaiah also said that Jerusalem would be called “the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City.”²

Literally, it makes little sense to bless a mountain. The thought is that Zion would again be a place of blessing because of the presence of the Lord. We tend to associate certain places with the experience we have there. In some cases the place where we said our first prayer and experienced salvation may stand out in our mind. It is obvious that it is not the place, but the experience that determines the value. I will never forget the retreat center in the Netherlands where Jesus came into my life. For Jacob, Bethel became such a place as he spent his first night away from home there. We read: “When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.’ Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.”³

A problem occurs when we separate the reality of the experience from the place and reduce the importance of the place to a ritualistic one. In His conversation with the Samaritan woman, Jesus touched on this, saying: “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”⁴ God’s righteous dwelling is in Jesus Christ; He is the real “sacred mountain.”

Jeremiah’s prophecy describes in the same breath a combination of city dwellers and farmers. In everyday life the two cannot live together in the same place. That is only possible poetically or prophetically. We believe, therefore, that the scene depicted is a spiritual one, rather than a physical reality, in the same way as the “sacred mountain” is the symbol of fellowship with God. The scene is like that of the twenty-third Psalm in which the Lord, our shepherd will refresh us physically, emotionally and spiritually.

V.26 indicates that this prophecy was a sweet dream for Jeremiah. We can look at this verse as a waking up to a harsh reality, emphasizing the waking up part of it. We can also see it as a waking up to another reality that surpasses in depth and meaning that which we call “real life.” The prophet Zechariah introduces his vision on the heavenly menorah with the words: “Then the angel who talked with me returned and wakened me, as a man is wakened from his sleep.”⁵ We tend to consider visions as a lesser reality. But Zechariah tells us that God’s reality is greater than what we call real. Jeremiah probably woke up in Jerusalem after Nebuchadnezzar’s troops had ransacked the city. His dream made him realize that God was still on the throne. That made him look at Judah’s ruins with a different eye. It was this sense of reality that caused Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsy to praise God in a flea-infested Nazi concentration camp where people were tortured and died. No one is more a realist than he who understands that God’s reality surpasses ours.

God promised those who were exiled in Babylon that He would display the same vigor and energy in restoring the people as He had demonstrated in punishing the nation. The ruins of Jerusalem testified to this vigor. This is expressed in agricultural terms as if God, like a farmer, sows His field with people and herds of animals.

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1. Zech. 8:3
 2. Isa. 1:26
 3. Gen. 28:16-19
 4. John 4:21-24
 5. Zech. 4:1

V.29, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge,” was a proverb the exiles used to say that they suffered the consequences of their parents’ sin. Ezekiel confirms that this saying was popular among the people from Judah who were in Babylon. We read: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this: “The popular aphorism of verse 29 reflected the skepticism of the exiles (cf. La. 5:7; Ezk. 18:1f), who felt that God was judging them unjustly for circumstances which were no fault of theirs. Jeremiah repudiates this idea, showing that in the future the people will be punished for the own sins. Ezekiel 18:2-4 amplifies this same theme of individual moral responsibility, already present in the Torah (Dt. 24:16).”

7. The new covenant 31:31-40

31 "The time is coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord.

33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

35 This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the Lord Almighty is his name:

36 "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me."

37 This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the Lord.

38 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate.

39 The measuring line will stretch from there straight to the hill of Gareb and then turn to Goah.

40 The whole valley where dead bodies and ashes are thrown, and all the terraces out to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the corner of the Horse Gate, will be holy to the Lord. The city will never again be uprooted or demolished."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this section and the new covenant it predicts: “The prophecy of Jeremiah marks a watershed in Hebrew religious and cultic life. From this point onward there is significant divergence between what has obtained in the past and what will characterize the future religious observance of Israel. Undergirding the whole of national life, and giving specification to Israel as the Chosen People, was the covenant relationship which had been established at Sinai. Basic to this agreement was the obligation of the Israelites to obey the divine stipulations, a situation familiar to them from their acquaintance with second-millennium BC secular international treaties. During the settlement period, however, the allurements of pagan Canaanite religion succeeded in wooing away the allegiance of the Israelites from their covenantal responsibilities. This departure constituted in effect the apostasy which, in an even more developed form, the pre-exile prophets were to condemn so resolutely.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary writes: “The concept of the new covenant is Jeremiah’s most important contribution to Biblical thought. The OT frequently mentions the covenant God made with Israel (Ex 19:3-8; 24:3-8; Deut 29:1), which covenant was the foundation of the Israelites’ national and religious

life. God makes clear, through Jeremiah, that Israel has failed to keep this covenant (Jer 7:21-26; 11:1-13) and predicts that He will make a new one with His people. The new covenant will not be a new law (the old law was still good), but it will produce a new ‘heart’ - i.e., it will confer a new motivation to obey the law of God. Jesus, while instituting the Lord’s Supper, declared, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood’ (ASV, 1 Cor 11:25; cf. Luke 22:20). The Hebrews epistle teaches that Christ brought in the new covenant by his perfect and final sacrifice for sin (Heb 7:22; 8:7-13; 10:15-22; cf. 2 Cor 3:5-14).”

The Pulpit Commentary states about this section that it is: “A prophecy which stands out from the rest of Jeremiah by its evangelical character, in which it strongly reminds us of parts of the second half of Isaiah. The doctrine of the covenant is ‘the thread which binds together the hopes and the fears of the prophet, his certainty of coming woe, his certainty of ultimate blessing.’ A covenant was granted of old, but that covenant had on man’s side been broken. Still ‘the gifts and calling of God are not to be retracted’ (...Romans 11:29); and Jeremiah felt that the very nature of God guaranteed the renewal of the covenant on a new basis.”

The Hebrew word for “covenant,” used here is *beriyth* which has the sense of “cutting.” The meaning is best illustrated in the pact God made with Abraham about which we read: “So the Lord said to him, ‘Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.’ Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half. Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them away. As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. Then the Lord said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.’ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.’”¹

The Pulpit Commentary considers the rendering of *beriyth* with “covenant” unfortunate, saying: “The Hebrew word so rendered means, primarily, a decision or appointment, and there is a whole group of passages in the Old Testament which requires this meaning.” The example of the covenant God made with Abraham, however, seems to emphasize the appropriateness of the translation. In the above illustration, God’s covenant with Abraham was one-sided. Only God passed between the cut-up pieces of animals. It was customary for both parties in a covenant to pass between the cut up pieces, identifying themselves with the cut-up animals and indicating that they would be cut up in similar fashion if they did not adhere to the stipulations of the agreement. What God did in His covenant with Abraham was an image of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. He became the slaughtered animal, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

The covenant God made with the Israelites as they came out of Egypt is the Law of Moses, which was binding for two parties. As Moses said about the law: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.”² The problem with the Law of Moses was the condition of the human heart. The Apostle Paul stated this problem clearly when he wrote in Romans that the law was powerless to save man because of man’s sinful nature. We read: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin

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1. Gen. 15:9-21
 2. Deut. 30:15,16

and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”¹

In the new covenant God places before His people, He takes it upon Himself to change the human heart, saying: “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.” In Ezekiel God repeats this promise, saying: “I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”² And even more clearly in: “I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”³ What God promises here is a new birth brought about by the Holy Spirit for those who turn to God and ask for forgiveness of their sins.

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The characteristics of the new covenant are three:
(1) The relation between God and his people is protected from all risk by God himself making the people what he would have them be.
(2) Whereas, in the case of the old, the law of duty was written on *tables of stone*, in the case of the new the law is to be written on the *heart*; whereas, under the old, owing to the ritual character of the worship, the knowledge of God and his will was a complicated affair, in which men generally were helplessly dependent on a professional class, under the new, the worship of God would be reduced to the simplest spiritual elements, and it would be in every man’s power to know God at first hand, the sole requisite for such knowledge as would then be required being a pure heart. And
(3) whereas, under the old, the provisions for the cancelling of sin were very unsatisfactory, and utterly unfit to perfect the worshipper as to conscience, by dealing thoroughly with the problem of guilt, under the new God would grant to his people a real, absolute, and perennial forgiveness, so that the abiding relation between him and them should be as if sin had never existed.”

The important clause of the new covenant is in v.34 – “I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” The key to the knowledge of God is in the forgiveness of our sins. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, sang in his song of praise that God would “give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins.”⁴ We understand salvation and receive eternal life when our sins are forgiven. And having eternal life means knowing God. As Jesus prayed: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”⁵

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments on the clause “after that time”: “When vision and prophecy shall be sealed up, and Jesus has assumed that body which was prepared for him, and has laid down his life for the redemption of a lost world, and, having ascended on high, shall have obtained the gift of the Holy Spirit to purify the heart; then God’s law shall, by it, be put in their inward parts, and written on their hearts; so that all within and all without shall be holiness to the Lord. Then God will be truly their God, received and acknowledged as their portion, and the sole object of their devotion; and they shall be his people, filled with holiness, and made partakers of the divine nature, so that they shall perfectly love him and worthily magnify his name.” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The old law could be broken (Jer 31:32); to remedy this God gives, not a new law, but a new power to the old law. It used to be a mere code of morals,

1. Rom. 8:1-4
2. Ezek. 11:19
3. Ezek. 36:25-27
4. Luke 1:77
5. John 17:3

external to man, and obeyed as a duty. In Christianity, it becomes an inner force, shaping man's character from within."

For us, who live in this dispensation of grace, who have received forgiveness of sin by the blood of Jesus, obedience to the will of God ought to be part of our new nature. Failure to obey points to a failure of love. Jesus says: "If you love me, you will obey what I command" and "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."¹ And a lack of love for God indicates a lack of experience of God's love for us. As John writes in his epistle: "We love because he first loved us."²

V.34 does not necessarily imply that evangelism is no longer needed. The message is not for those who have never heard, but for those who had heard and had not grown spiritually. The problem the author of *Hebrews* was facing will no longer be there, the one about which he wrote: "We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil."³ The Holy Spirit will be the teacher of every believer, as Jesus says: "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."⁴

In vv.35-37 Jeremiah evokes the same kind of picture Isaiah painted when speaking about God as the Creator of the universe. The difference between the two images is that Isaiah looked at the night sky while Jeremiah stands mainly in broad daylight. Isaiah said: "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."⁵

The question is what takes more of God's creative power, to call into being the stars and moons that populate the universe, or to change the human heart from stone into flesh? We cannot answer this question rashly. The heavenly bodies are not created in the image of God and endowed with a free will like humans are. In order for the human heart to change, God cannot simply speak and make it happen; He needs our consent and our act of surrender. God's relationship with the stars and planets is not a relationship of love which makes the heavenly bodies obey. In order to woo us into such a love relationship the Word became flesh, God became one of us and like us so that we had the option of becoming like Him. There is in this no guarantee of one hundred percent success, otherwise there would be no hell.

The illustration of the creation of the universe does not mean that God will force us to comply, but that He has the power to make us what He wants us to be, if we allow Him to do so. The promise that there will always be an "Israel" is like to Jesus' promise to Peter: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."⁶

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: "Probably the most significant contribution which Jeremiah made to religious thought was inherent in his insistence that the new covenant involved a one-to-one relationship of the spirit. When the new covenant was inaugurated by the atoning

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1. John 14:15,21
 2. I John 4:19
 3. Heb. 5:11-14
 4. John 6:45
 5. Isa. 40:25,26
 6. Matt. 16:18

work of Jesus Christ on Calvary, this important development was made real for the whole of mankind. Henceforward anyone who submitted himself consciously in faith to the person of Christ as Savior and Lord could claim and receive membership in the church of God. The new covenant in the blood of Christ, therefore, is the fruition of God's sovereign grace, conveying through a specifically spiritual relationship an adequate provision for the forgiveness of all sin, a more profound experience of divine mercy as a result of such forgiveness, and a wider sense of brotherhood among men by virtue of membership in the fellowship of Christ."

The last verses of this chapter, 37-40, deal with the rebuilding of the people and the city. This is expressed in terms of physical and material restoration as an image of a spiritual reality. As the return of the people is symbolized by the new covenant, which changes the human heart, so the rebuilding of the city becomes a figure of more than repair of buildings and walls. It is true that a remnant of Judah did return and the city was rebuilt, but that was not the reality God envisioned in these verses. The New Jerusalem we see in *Revelation* may look like a city, but it is actually a body of people, the body of Christ, the bride of the Lamb. This is ultimately what God has in mind in these verses.

This heavenly reality is foreshadowed in various human experiences. Even on a planet that has been ravaged by sin, we know what human love is and what marital intimacy is supposed to look like. We can also understand that our experiences here and now must be pointers to a spiritual reality that is presently beyond our horizon. We can understand that our relationships here below are meaningful because they reflect another reality in which we will enter above. God prepares us for a total and eternal fulfillment of which earthly satisfactions can only give a deluded foretaste. What we experience here is meant to whet our appetite for the real thing to come.

About the fulfillment of all this, says the Lord, that it is immeasurable and unsearchable. As the extent of the universe is beyond the scope of our vision and the magna of the planet on which we live prevents us from penetrating to the core, so is God's plan for His people immense and inestimable, yet eternally real.

About the rebuilding of the city, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Its circumference shall even be extended with the single object of including spots at present unclean, but then to become holy like the rest of the city." The prophet Zechariah mentions the same place in his prophecy about the restoration of the city. We read: "The whole land, from Geba to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, will become like the Arabah. But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses."¹

The valley of dead bodies in v.40 is the valley of Ben Hinnom, mentioned earlier by Jeremiah. It is the place where the people brought human sacrifices to Moloch. We read earlier about this place: "They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire — something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate."² It is the place where Jeremiah preached his message to the elders and priests and where he smashed the clay jar to pieces.³ When God claims this area for Himself, saying that it will become holy, He promises resurrection from the dead and reversal of judgment.

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1. Zech. 14:10
 2. Jer. 7:31-34
 3. See Jer. 19:1-6.

The last phrase of this chapter “The city will never again be uprooted or demolished” gives us to understand that, although God may have been looking down upon the city Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed, He was not speaking about that place when giving these promises. When Jesus’ disciples pointed to the temple in Jerusalem, He replied: “Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”¹ That is what happened when the Romans destroyed the same city again in 70 A.D.

VII. PROPHECIES FROM THE TIME OF ZEDEKIAH 32:1–44:30

1. A practical demonstration of faith in the future of the nation 32:1-44

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.

2 The army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem, and Jeremiah the prophet was confined in the courtyard of the guard in the royal palace of Judah.

3 Now Zedekiah king of Judah had imprisoned him there, saying, "Why do you prophesy as you do? You say, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will capture it.

4 Zedekiah king of Judah will not escape out of the hands of the Babylonians but will certainly be handed over to the king of Babylon, and will speak with him face to face and see him with his own eyes.

5 He will take Zedekiah to Babylon, where he will remain until I deal with him, declares the Lord. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will not succeed."

6 Jeremiah said, "The word of the Lord came to me:

7 Hanamel son of Shallum your uncle is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field at Anathoth, because as nearest relative it is your right and duty to buy it.'

8 "Then, just as the Lord had said, my cousin Hanamel came to me in the courtyard of the guard and said, 'Buy my field at Anathoth in the territory of Benjamin. Since it is your right to redeem it and possess it, buy it for yourself.' "I knew that this was the word of the Lord;

9 so I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel and weighed out for him seventeen shekels of silver.

10 I signed and sealed the deed, had it witnessed, and weighed out the silver on the scales.

11 I took the deed of purchase — the sealed copy containing the terms and conditions, as well as the unsealed copy —

12 and I gave this deed to Baruch son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of my cousin Hanamel and of the witnesses who had signed the deed and of all the Jews sitting in the courtyard of the guard.

13 "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions:

14 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents, both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time.

15 For this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land.'

16 "After I had given the deed of purchase to Baruch son of Neriah, I prayed to the Lord:

17 "Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.

18 You show love to thousands but bring the punishment for the fathers' sins into the laps of their children after them. O great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty,

1. Matt. 24:2

19 great are your purposes and mighty are your deeds. Your eyes are open to all the ways of men; you reward everyone according to his conduct and as his deeds deserve.

20 You performed miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt and have continued them to this day, both in Israel and among all mankind, and have gained the renown that is still yours.

21 You brought your people Israel out of Egypt with signs and wonders, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with great terror.

22 You gave them this land you had sworn to give their forefathers, a land flowing with milk and honey.

23 They came in and took possession of it, but they did not obey you or follow your law; they did not do what you commanded them to do. So you brought all this disaster upon them.

24 "See how the siege ramps are built up to take the city. Because of the sword, famine and plague, the city will be handed over to the Babylonians who are attacking it. What you said has happened, as you now see.

25 And though the city will be handed over to the Babylonians, you, O Sovereign Lord, say to me, 'Buy the field with silver and have the transaction witnessed.'"

26 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

27 "I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?"

28 Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the Babylonians and to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who will capture it.

29 The Babylonians who are attacking this city will come in and set it on fire; they will burn it down, along with the houses where the people provoked me to anger by burning incense on the roofs to Baal and by pouring out drink offerings to other gods.

30 "The people of Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil in my sight from their youth; indeed, the people of Israel have done nothing but provoke me with what their hands have made, declares the Lord.

31 From the day it was built until now, this city has so aroused my anger and wrath that I must remove it from my sight.

32 The people of Israel and Judah have provoked me by all the evil they have done — they, their kings and officials, their priests and prophets, the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem.

33 They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.

34 They set up their abominable idols in the house that bears my Name and defiled it.

35 They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin.

36 "You are saying about this city, 'By the sword, famine and plague it will be handed over to the king of Babylon'; but this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:

37 I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety.

38 They will be my people, and I will be their God.

39 I will give them singleness of heart and action, so that they will always fear me for their own good and the good of their children after them.

40 I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good to them, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me.

41 I will rejoice in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land with all my heart and soul.

42 "This is what the Lord says: As I have brought all this great calamity on this people, so I will give them all the prosperity I have promised them.

43 Once more fields will be bought in this land of which you say, 'It is a desolate waste, without men or animals, for it has been handed over to the Babylonians.'

44 Fields will be bought for silver, and deeds will be signed, sealed and witnessed in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah and in the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, because I will restore their fortunes, declares the Lord."

Chapter 33 is one of the most amazing chapters in this book. It deals with a businesses transaction that turns out to be an object lesson of faith, hope and comfort, the consequences of which turn out to be much deeper and greater than an casual glance at the text would suggest.

The real point revealed is not merely the restoration of the city that is about to be ransacked and the return of the captives, who are about to be taken, but the coming of the Messiah and the resurrection from the dead. The key verse in the whole chapter is “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’ For this is what the Lord says: ‘David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.’”¹

Vv.1-5 describe Jeremiah’s circumstances at this point during the siege of Jerusalem. He was put in jail, but not in the restricted condition in which he would be confined later. Quoting Calving, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Marvelous obstinacy, that, at the time when they were experiencing the truth of Jeremiah’s words in the pressure of the siege, they should still keep the prophet in confinement.” This imprisonment was an act of personal vengeance by King Zedekiah because Jeremiah had predicted what would happen to him when Nebuchadnezzar took the city. This did not happen until two years later, but at that time the king would have no chance to apologize to the prophet. Jeremiah had advised the king to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, which advice sounded like a betrayal of the cause.

Conditions at this time seemed very bleak. There would be a break of the siege at one point, which is described in a later chapter, when Pharaoh-hophra caused Nebuchadnezzar to temporarily interrupt the siege.² That seemed to be a relief, but was, in fact, not, because the Babylonians returned and the city was taken.

At this moment of darkness, the Lord encourages His prophet by sending him a ray of hope, showing that Israel’s destruction would not be absolute and final. What God said to Jeremiah did not seem to make much sense. His cousin Hanamel would come and ask him to exercise his obligation of being the redeeming relative and buy a certain field at Anathoth, the place of Jeremiah’s origin. There is some confusion in the Hebrew text as to whether Hanamel was Jeremiah’s cousin or uncle. As *The Pulpit Commentary* explains, the term “uncle” may have been an affectionate title, given to people who were not literally uncles. When Hanamel came, Jeremiah knew what the Lord wanted him to do, although logically this was not what seemed right to do under the circumstances. We are not given any details about the cousin’s need. He must have been living in Jerusalem at that time, because the Babylonian siege would not allow anyone to come into the city from the countryside.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “This chapter is important because it provides a tangible demonstration of Jeremiah’s faith and hope for the future restoration of his people. The incident occurred in 588/7 BC, while the Babylonians were hammering at the gates of Jerusalem preparatory to ravaging it a few months later. Jeremiah purchased the title to a piece of family property, knowing that while he himself would never settle there under the future conditions of peace and prosperity, other exiles would return and resume life on familiar soil.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The opportunity ... of purchasing a piece of ground at Anathoth was the occasion which called forth the most striking proof of his sublime confidence in God. Not that he

1. Jer. 33:15-18
2. See Jer. 37.

understood how it could be God's will that he, in the besieged city, should constitute himself a landed proprietor. He had his difficulties; but instead of brooding over them, he laid them before Jehovah in prayer. And the Divine revelation came that, though long continued transgressions had brought upon Judah the sorest punishment, they should yet be restored to their land; and, though the first covenant had been broken, a second and an everlasting covenant should in future times be granted to God's people; and the sign that the first part of this promise should in very deed be realized is the purchase of the field by Jeremiah."

We will learn later on in this chapter that Jeremiah had some personal misgivings about the deal,¹ and how the Lord had to reassure him by showing him the meaning of this apparently meaningless business transaction.² Jeremiah paid seventeen shekels of silver for the field. A footnote in *The New International Version* puts this on 7 ounces of silver. *Barnes' Notes* observes about the business part of it: "The price apparently was small, but was more than the land commercially was worth ... But though the estate was not worth the purchase, the opportunity was precious as a means of assuring the people that God would certainly bring them back."

We could even say that God, in a way, shared His own "hope" with Jeremiah because the thought of seeing His city destroyed, the people killed or taken into captivity, was too much to bear, even for a God who knows the future. It is for a good reason the Apostle Paul calls God "the God of hope." Writing to the Romans he prays: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."³

Interestingly, this is the first time we are introduced to Baruch. Baruch had been Jeremiah's assistant for a while, but the mixed-up chronology of this book accounts for the fact that we have not read his name before.

Vv.9-12 describe in detail how the business was transacted in the prison courtyard in the presence of witnesses. There was a title deed made in duplicate, which were both signed by Jeremiah and witnesses. The original deed was sealed, but the copy was not and both were given to Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary. All this was done before a group of Jews to whom Jeremiah's act must have made as little sense as to the prophet himself. They must have thought him to be inconsistent, preaching judgment and acting as if there would be a bright future. By way of explanation, Jeremiah then tells the people present the meaning of the transaction they witnessed. First of all, the instructions to Baruch to store the documents in a jar of clay served as an indication that the future of hope was a distant one. The promise of the Lord that "houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land" was not the same message the false prophets had preached earlier.

The following moving account of Jeremiah's prayer and the Lord's reply, vv.16-44, is what must have taken place in private, not in the presence of the crowd that witnessed the transaction.

The Adam Clarke's Commentary exclaims about Jeremiah's prayer: "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."

Jeremiah begins his prayer by recognizing God's greatness as Creator. That is the basis for all knowledge of God and for the faith that is required to obtain answers to prayer. Looking at the universe and at the planet upon which we live, we must come to the logical conclusion that the One who made all this will be sufficient to do what we ask Him to do. The Apostle Paul, in *Romans*, states this forcefully, though in a negative context, saying: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and

1. Jer. 32:16-25
2. Jer. 32:26-44
3. Rom. 15:13

wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”¹ Jeremiah realizes that the God who created the sun is also sufficient to rebuild Jerusalem and bring His people back. A glance at nature ought to bring us all to Jeremiah's conclusion: “Nothing is too hard for you.”

The mention of God's love and also His punishment of the children for the sins of the fathers is a reference to the first of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”² The Hebrew word for God's love is *chesed*, which older translations render “lovingkindness.” Behind the warning of this commandment is the reality of demonic influences which may make their presence felt from one generation to another. The reference to idolatry was very pertinent, since that was the reason for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity.

Jeremiah addresses God in this prayer as “God, the Great the Mighty, the Lord of hosts.” *The New International Version* renders this: “great and powerful God, whose name is the Lord Almighty.” The Hebrew word, rendered “purposes” in v.19 is *etsah*, which has the meaning of discernment or counsel. When David fled for Absalom, he used the word in his prayer: “O Lord, turn Ahithophel's *counsel* into foolishness.”³ Jeremiah confesses that God is right in His punishment of Judah. There had been ample warning of what would happen if the people continued in their idolatry. God could not be blamed for the destruction of the city and the captivity; the people had brought that upon themselves. Thus far Jeremiah's prayer concentrated on the condition of the city under siege.

From there he goes back into history in order to remember what had brought Israel to the place God had intended for them to occupy in the world. The exodus from Egypt was as much a sheer impossibility as would be the restoration of the city and the rehabilitation of the people. But since God had done it in the past there was no reason to believe that He would not do it again. But then, looking around once more to the city surrounded by Babylonian troops and wasting away with famine and sickness, Jeremiah wonders how God could have asked him to buy real estate in Anathoth.

Jeremiah confesses “Nothing is too hard for you.” The Hebrew word used is *pala'*, which has the root meaning of “to separate,” or “distinguish.” It is usually rendered “difficult,” or “wonderful.” God used it first Himself in the announcement that Sarah would have a child, saying: Is anything *too hard* for the Lord?”⁴ It is also used to describe the supernatural plagues of Egypt in the verse: “So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all *the wonders* that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.”⁵

The two examples given here place Jeremiah's purchase of a field in the same category. The supernatural in the birth of Isaac was not the fact that a baby was born, but that he was born from parents who, because of their age were not supposed to be able to have children anymore. The Apostle Paul describes Abraham's condition, saying: “He faced the fact that his body was as good as dead — since he was about a hundred years old — and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded

1. Rom. 1:18-20
2. Ex. 20:4-6
3. II Sam. 15:31
4. Gen. 18:14
5. Ex. 3:20

that God had power to do what he had promised.”¹ In the case of Israel in Egypt, where the Israelites were the slaves and the Egyptians the masters, there was no way the Egyptians would decide to set their slaves free and allow them to leave. God’s supernatural intervention brought that about.

Jeremiah’s purchase of the field in Anathoth was not only poor business as far as business deals is concerned, humanly speaking it was foolishness. The country was about to become scorched earth, the capital city was in its final throws of death. Jeremiah bought a piece of real estate that he would never be able to enjoy. Death was written all over the country and the people. A normal reaction to the proposal put to Jeremiah in that situation would have been: “It’s too late now.” A New Testament equivalent of Jeremiah’s experience is the death and resurrection of Jairus’ daughter. We read: “While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. ‘Your daughter is dead,’ they said. ‘Why bother the teacher any more?’ Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler, ‘Don’t be afraid; just believe.’”²

Having recognized God as the Creator of the universe and having said in his prayer “Nothing is too hard for you,” Jeremiah retraces in history God’s acts of salvation, particularly those that brought Israel to her destination in the Promised Land. But now the history of salvation comes to a dead end as far as Jeremiah can see. When the city falls in the hands of the Babylonians, the Promised Land will be a graveyard. Death does have the last word in the history of life. And Jeremiah’s question to God is: “So, why did you make me do this?”

In vv.26-44 God answers Jeremiah, by quoting back to him his own words: “Is anything too hard for me?” *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The answer is divided into two parts; (a) Jer 32:26-35, the sins of Judah are shown to be the cause of her punishment: (b) Jer 32:36-44, this punishment was not for Judah’s destruction, but for her amendment.”

The Hebrew of v.27 reads literally: “Behold, I am the Lord God of all flesh.” The Hebrew word *basar* means “flesh,” “body,” or “person.” The first time it is used in Scripture is in the verses: “So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with *flesh*” and “The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and *flesh* of my *flesh*; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”³ In calling Himself by that Name, the Lord also repeats Jeremiah’s words, although not literally. As Creator of heaven and earth, God has the right and the power to judge and punish all that do not live up to the standards of His holiness.

Although the northern kingdom had ceased to exist, God still speaks about Israel and Judah as one people, saying that they had done nothing but evil since their youth. In his great farewell speech, Moses spoke these words to the young nation that was about to enter the Promised Land: “I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. They have acted corruptly toward him; to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation. Is this the way you repay the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?”⁴ Israel’s mentality had not changed over the centuries. As *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The fall of Jerusalem is the climax of the series of punishments which the two separated and yet (in God’s sight) united portions of the people of Israel have had to undergo.”

In sinning against the first commandment, which states: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them,” they broke the whole law, incurring

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1. Rom. 4:19-21
 2. Mark 5:35,36
 3. Gen. 2:21, 23
 4. Deut. 32:3-6

capital punishment upon themselves. The most horrible feature of their idol worship was the human sacrifices they brought, killing their own children and feeding them to God's enemy.

Jerusalem would be taken and burned and some of the people would be killed and others taken into captivity. But God cannot allow Himself to look at that condition as final. For Him who is the God of the living and not of the dead, death cannot have the final word. God wants us to share in His hope. As the Apostle Paul says: "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."¹ Jeremiah could not see this hope, but God does and He shares this vision with His servant.

The revelation God shares with Jeremiah sounds as wishful thinking. In a way it is, but not in the sense that we attribute to those words. It is impossible for us to understand how God, who lives in eternity, who sees the future as the present, can "indulge" in dreaming about the future. We must see this as God speaking to us in a language we can understand because, living in time, that is the way we think and act. God speaks about an everlasting covenant He will make with His children. That is the same covenant the author of Hebrews speaks about, saying: "May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will."² All this is put in terms of people returning physically to a geographic place on earth, living an everyday life of work, transacting business deals, etc. But the reality is a spiritual one in which the human heart is changed from stone to flesh and human beings have intercourse with God through the Person of Jesus Christ.

Jeremiah's purchase of a field in Anathoth becomes an image of the great plan of salvation God has for all of mankind.

2. The implications of national restoration 33:1-26

1 While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him a second time:

2 "This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it — the Lord is his name:

3 'Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.'

4 For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the houses in this city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword

5 in the fight with the Babylonians: 'They will be filled with the dead bodies of the men I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness.

6 "'Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.

7 I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before.

8 I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.

9 Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.'

1. Rom. 8:22-25

2. Heb. 13:20,21

10 *"This is what the Lord says: 'You say about this place, 'It is a desolate waste, without men or animals.' Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither men nor animals, there will be heard once more*

11 the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, 'Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever.' For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the Lord.

12 *"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In this place, desolate and without men or animals — in all its towns there will again be pastures for shepherds to rest their flocks.*

13 In the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them,' says the Lord.

14 *"'The days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.*

15 'In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.'

17 *For this is what the Lord says: 'David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel,*

18 nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.'"

19 *The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:*

20 *"This is what the Lord says: 'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time,*

21 then my covenant with David my servant — and my covenant with the Levites who are priests ministering before me — can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne.

22 I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore.'"

23 *The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:*

24 *"Have you not noticed that these people are saying, 'The Lord has rejected the two kingdoms he chose'? So they despise my people and no longer regard them as a nation.*

25 This is what the Lord says: 'If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed laws of heaven and earth,

26 then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his sons to rule over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and have compassion on them.'"

There is no indication how much time elapsed between God's answer to Jeremiah's prayer in the previous chapter and this one. We are only told that Jeremiah was still imprisoned.

Barnes' Notes states about this chapter: "The promises of Jer 32 are confirmed, but with a more directly spiritual meaning. The prophet foreshows in it the happiness of the returning exiles, of which the culminating glory is Messiah's birth (Jer 33:15-16), in whom both the Levitical priesthood and the Davidic kingdom are combined (Jer 33:17-18), and God's covenant with mankind made perpetual (Jer 33:19-26)."

The Hebrew text of v.2 reads literally: "Thus says the Yahweh, the maker thereof, Yahweh that formed it, to establish it; Yahweh is his name." *The New International Version* inserts "the earth" for "it," which seems a logical conclusion. Calvin believed that "it" stands for Jerusalem.

God issues an invitation to pray, first of all to Jeremiah, but in him also to the people of Judah who were about to be hit by disaster, and ultimately to all of mankind. Jesus repeated this invitation when He

said: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”¹ In answer to prayer God will reveal His secrets, as David sang in the Psalms: “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, And He will show them His covenant.”² Although this invitation to prayer is followed by a description of disaster and death, that is not the secret intended here. The “great and unsearchable things” are what is mentioned beginning with v.6 of this chapter.

There are some textual problems in this section that have divided opinions of scholars about the meaning of some of the verses. In v. 3, the Hebrew word used for “unsearchable things” is *batsar*, which literally means: “to clip off.” It also has the meaning of “to be isolated,” “to be inaccessible.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the verse “The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be *impossible* for them.’”³ We also find it in “Do not reap what grows of itself or *harvest* the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.”⁴ And in the report of the spies who returned from surveying Canaan: “But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are *fortified* and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there.”⁵

God promises “health and healing” to His people. The Hebrew words used are ‘*aruwkah* and *marpe*’. They are practically synonymous. ‘*Aruwkah* may have more the meaning of repair. We find it, for instance, in the verse in Nehemiah: “But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that *the repairs* to Jerusalem’s walls *had gone ahead* and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry.”⁶ *Marpe*’ is used frequently in *Proverbs*, for instance in the fatherly advice: ““My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and *health* to a man’s whole body.”⁷

Health, healing, peace and security do not seem to be “great and unsearchable things” in themselves, but in the context of death and destruction they certainly are. The miracle God speaks about here is best illustrated in Ezekiel’s vision of the valley filled with dry bones.⁸ In that vision, God said to Ezekiel: “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”⁹ The greatest and most unsearchable thing is the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ in which God intends us to participate. As the Apostle Paul says: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”¹⁰

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1. Matt. 7:7,8
 2. Ps. 25:14 - NKJV
 3. Gen. 11:6
 4. Lev. 25:5
 5. Num. 13:28
 6. Neh. 4:7
 7. Prov. 4:20-22
 8. See Ezek. 37:1-14.
 9. Ezek. 37:11-14
 10. Rom. 8:11

V.9 reads literally in Hebrew: “And it shall be a name of joy to me...” The Hebrew word *shem* is usually rendered “name,” but it can also be used in the sense of a “memorial,” as in the story of the tower of Babel, where the people said: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a *name* for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”¹ We also find it used in the verse “During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, ‘I have no son to carry on the memory of my *name*.’ He named the pillar after *himself*, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.”²

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments here: “The name of Jerusalem will be synonymous with God’s loving mercies to His penitent people. The new covenant will continue to witness to God’s character and saving grace, and its adherents, now purified from all idolatrous traits, will stand firm in a pagan world as witnesses to the existence and mighty acts of God.”

Even with the widest stretch of imagination we cannot say that the city that was rebuilt after the return of the captives corresponds to the picture drawn for us here. At the time of rebuilding, the inhabitants of Palestine wrote to the Persian king: “The king should know that the Jews who came up to us from you have gone to Jerusalem and are rebuilding that rebellious and wicked city. They are restoring the walls and repairing the foundations.”³ That report was false and the accusations were politically motivated, but they show that the nations of the world did not praise God for the rebuilding of the city as this prophecy suggests. And Jesus lamented over Jerusalem of His day: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.”⁴ The only city that corresponds to the one described here is the New Jerusalem, of which John testifies: “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”⁵

When God said to Jeremiah: “You say about this place, ‘It is a desolate waste, without men or animals,’” the Babylonians had not yet captured the city. Jeremiah was still in prison. Jeremiah’s gloomy vision would become a reality shortly. God’s prophetic promise ought to have helped Jeremiah to lift the gloom, but it did not. He found himself unable to see beyond death to the resurrection God promised here. We should be able to identify with him herein, because for us too, death is all we can see with our physical eyes. God wants us to use our eye of faith to see what is beyond. In the day of resurrection we will all shine with the glory of God. Some of that glory should be reflected in us in the city of death in which we live today.

The glory of the New Jerusalem is expressed in two images: the voices of bride and bridegroom and the voices of those who bring thank offerings. Three times before Jeremiah mentioned “the voices of bride and bridegroom” but in a negative context. God had told Jeremiah: “I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.”⁶ Here this joy is restored. It is the joy of the most intimate human relationship, the one Adam experienced when he first saw Eve and said: “This is now bone of my

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1. Gen. 11:4
 2. II Sam. 18:18
 3. Ezra 4:12
 4. Matt. 23:37
 5. Rev. 21:2,11
 6. See Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10,11.

bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”¹ The joy expressed here is physical and emotional.

The second image of joy is a spiritual one. It is the joy of the person who has experienced the forgiveness of his sins. The thank offering was part of the peace offering, described in Leviticus.² It was a bloody sacrifice in which an animal was sacrificed to the Lord in answer to God’s forgiveness of sins committed and sinful nature transformed. The thank offering could only be brought by someone who had already brought a guilt offering and a sin offering. In all cases, a sacrificial animal substituted for the person who brought it. The man who sacrificed the animal put his hand on the animal’s head, identifying himself with it. So the thank offering actually depicted a person who was willing to give his life to the Lord in answer to God’s goodness and lovingkindness.

“Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever” is a liturgical refrain that runs through the Psalms, particularly in Psalm 136, where it is repeated 26 times.

The Hebrew word for “fortunes” is *shebuwth*, which literally means: “exile.” We find it, among others, in the verse: “Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negev.”³

Vv.12 and 13 move out of the city of Jerusalem to the surrounding areas. The Babylonians would not only ransack the city but scorch the countryside as well. No living soul, human or animal would remain where the army moved through. But the Lord would give the kiss of life to that dead countryside also and repopulate it with people and herds.

Vv.14-26 form the core of Jeremiah’s prophecy that covers these three chapters. This is the essence of the Lord’s “glorious promise.” “Glorious promise” is the translation of the Hebrew *dabar towb*, literally “good word.” That “good word” is what God answered David when he made known his desire to build a temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. The prophet Nathan told the king: “I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you: When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.”⁴

Ezekiel elaborates on this promise while in captivity in Babylon. We read that God says to him: “I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the Lord have spoken.”⁵ And: “They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.”⁶

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “Jeremiah does not reveal as much about the coming Messiah as Isaiah does, but nevertheless provides glimpses of Christ as the Fountain of living

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1. Gen. 2:23
 2. See Lev. 3 and 7.
 3. Ps. 126:4
 4. II Chron. 17:10-14
 5. Ezek. 34:23,24
 6. Ezek. 37:25-28

waters (2:13), the good Shepherd (23:4; 31:10), the righteous Branch (23:5), the Redeemer (50:34), the Lord our righteousness (23:6) and David the king (30:9).”

The promise given here was fulfilled in Jesus. When the angel Gabriel made the announcement to Mary, he said: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”¹ Jesus would fulfill that which was impossible in Old Testament times; He would hold the office of king and priest at the same time. The author of Hebrew calls Jesus: “the apostle and high priest whom we confess.”² And he says: “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.”³

The same author, quoting one of David’s Psalms,⁴ calls Jesus “priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.”⁵ And he says about Melchizedek: “This Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God Most High.”⁶ The man to sit on David’s throne and the Levite who stands continually before God “to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices” is one and the same Person: Prince of peace and priest of God Most High.

It is obvious that this glorious promise was not fulfilled when the remnant of captives returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple and the city. It was not even completed totally when Jesus was born, lived on earth, died at Golgotha and rose from the grave. Although in the present dispensation we may enjoy the first fruit of all of this in our Christian life, the complete fulfillment of the promise is still to come. No place or person at present can be called “The Lord Our Righteousness,” certainly not present day Jerusalem.

Jeremiah had earlier pronounced similar words, saying: “In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.”⁷ There is some question among Bible scholars as to whether the name ought to be applied to the city of Jerusalem or to the Person of Christ. If the city in question is the New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb, the title may be applied to both, since in that royal marriage, as in all marriages, husband and wife are one. Christ, our righteousness, demonstrates His righteousness through us. In a way, this does apply to our present time. In the same way as Jesus could say to His disciples: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,”⁸ we ought to be able to say: “Anyone who has seen me has seen Jesus.” But who can say that?

Vv.19-21 move from the singular to the plural, from the office of king to the office of priests. It is true, of course, that there can only be one king in a country, but, although there was only one high priest, there were many Levites who served as priests. Vv.17 and 18 spoke about one person who fulfilled both offices at the same time, vv.19-21 speak about many. In the New Testament, those who are in Christ are not addressed as kings, but as a kingdom. As it is said in Revelation: “To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”⁹ Yet, when the Apostle Paul states that we “reign in life,”

1. Luke 1:32,33
2. Heb. 3:1
3. Heb. 4:14,15
4. Ps. 110:4
5. Heb. 5:6
6. Heb 7:1
7. Jer. 23:6
8. John 14:9

as in: “For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ,”¹ does that not make us into kings?

The wording here is similar to what God promised Abraham. We read: “I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted,” and “‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’”² This promise is given in terms as strong as the laws that govern our solar system. God promised Noah: “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”³

The Pulpit Commentary observes: “The constant, regular succession of day and night is an emblem of the equally regular supply of royal descendants of David and of Levitical priests, and the countless grains of sand are symbolic of the wonderful increase of their numbers. At first sight the latter part of the promise seems a little unlike a blessing. But we have seen already (on ... Jeremiah 19:3) that the members of the various branches of the royal family probably occupied the principal offices of the state, and the prophet imagines the future in forms borrowed from the present. A numerous sacerdotal class seemed equally necessary for the due magnificence of the ritual; and we must remember that preternatural fertility of the soil was a standing element of Messianic descriptions. The expressions used are, no doubt, hyperbolic, but the meaning seems clear enough.”

In v.23 we read for the third time in this chapter “The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.” Although this suggests that God spoke the words that are recorded here at three different occasions, that is not necessarily a foregone conclusion.

In quoting what the people of Judah say, *The New International Version* renders the Word of the Lord: “The Lord has rejected the two kingdoms he chose,” stating in a footnote the optional reading “families,” for “kingdoms.” The question is whether the northern kingdom and the kingdom of Judah are meant, or the two families of David and Levi. The Hebrew word used is *mishpachah*, which in most cases is rendered “family.” *The Pulpit Commentary* states: The ‘two families,’ of course, are the ‘two houses of Israel’ (... Isaiah 8:14), *i.e.* the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah.” The reference in Isaiah reads: “The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary; but for both houses of Israel he will be a stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall. And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare.” But the Hebrew word for “houses” there is not the same as in this verse. Most Bible scholars side with the interpretation of *The Pulpit Commentary*. It is, however, difficult to decide what is meant. It seems unlikely that the people of Judah would speak about the royal family and the priesthood at this point. It would mean that they took Jeremiah’s prophecy seriously. But that cannot be ruled out.

The point of the last verses of this chapter is that God, on the basis of His covenant, considers the two kingdoms as one nation under the rule of the Messiah, the single person who will be both king and priest forever.

3. The beginning of the end of Judah 34:1-22

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9. Rev. 1:5,6
 1. Rom. 5:17
 2. Gen.13:16; 15:5
 3. Gen. 8:22

1 While Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army and all the kingdoms and peoples in the empire he ruled were fighting against Jerusalem and all its surrounding towns, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Go to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, 'This is what the Lord says: I am about to hand this city over to the king of Babylon, and he will burn it down.

3 You will not escape from his grasp but will surely be captured and handed over to him. You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face. And you will go to Babylon.

4 "Yet hear the promise of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah. This is what the Lord says concerning you: You will not die by the sword;

5 you will die peacefully. As people made a funeral fire in honor of your fathers, the former kings who preceded you, so they will make a fire in your honor and lament, "Alas, O master!" I myself make this promise, declares the Lord.'"

6 Then Jeremiah the prophet told all this to Zedekiah king of Judah, in Jerusalem,

7 while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out — Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah.

8 The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to proclaim freedom for the slaves.

9 Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage.

10 So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free.

11 But afterward they changed their minds and took back the slaves they had freed and enslaved them again.

12 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

13 "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I made a covenant with your forefathers when I brought them out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. I said,

14 'Every seventh year each of you must free any fellow Hebrew who has sold himself to you. After he has served you six years, you must let him go free.' Your fathers, however, did not listen to me or pay attention to me.

15 Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name.

16 But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again.

17 "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: You have not obeyed me; you have not proclaimed freedom for your fellow countrymen. So I now proclaim 'freedom' for you, declares the Lord — 'freedom' to fall by the sword, plague and famine. I will make you abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth.

18 The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.

19 The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf,

20 I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.

21 "I will hand Zedekiah king of Judah and his officials over to their enemies who seek their lives, to the army of the king of Babylon, which has withdrawn from you.

22 I am going to give the order, declares the Lord, and I will bring them back to this city. They will fight against it, take it and burn it down. And I will lay waste the towns of Judah so no one can live there."

There is here again an obvious lack of chronology. What is described in this chapter caused Jeremiah to be incarcerated and experience what was reported in previous chapters.¹ In introducing this section, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains: “The biographical material is now resumed, but says little of what Jeremiah did between 594 and 590 BC, though he would doubtless continue to express his sense of imminent doom and the need for submission to Babylon if the land is to be saved. The final assault has obviously commenced (34:1), provoked by Zedekiah’s rebellion against Babylon in 589 BC. According to 52:4 the Babylonians commenced the siege early in 588 BC, while at the same time reducing the fortified towns in Judah as quickly as possible. This chapter describes the early stages of the final assault on Jerusalem, and shows the hopelessness of Zedekiah’s position. The mention of Lachish and Azekah (7) would indicate the same period as that reflected in Ostrakon IV from Lachish, in which the commander of an outpost near Jerusalem was writing to his counterpart at Lachish stating that he was waiting for fire signals, since he could not see Azekah. If the latter meant that Azekah had already fallen, it would date from a period immediately after Jeremiah’s declaration in this chapter.”

The Pulpit Commentary states: “This chapter must be taken in connection with ch. 35. The whole section consists of three passages, introduced with a superscription in the same form, but otherwise unrelated. It serves to finish off the earlier prophetic portion of the book, ch. 36. opening a series of narratives. The first passage (... Jeremiah 34:1-7) is virtually a postscript to ch. 32., 33.; it apparently contains the prophecy referred to in ... Jeremiah 32:3-5 as the cause of Jeremiah’s imprisonment. The same prophecy recurs in a shorter form in ... Jeremiah 37:17, and, by comparing the context of this passage with ... Jeremiah 32:1, etc., we are enabled to infer that the original prophecy was uttered at the renewal of the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans, who had withdrawn for a time on the news of the approach of Pharaoh’s army.”

Compared to what actually happened to Zedekiah, Jeremiah’s prophecy about the king’s fate sounded rather mild and comforting. “You will see the king of Babylon with your own eyes, and he will speak with you face to face” would not be a benign interview but a horrible and cruel sentence. We read in *Second Kings*: “He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon.”² Seeing Nebuchadnezzar face to face would be the last thing Zedekiah would ever see. The image of his sons being killed would haunt the king for the rest of his life.

We get the impression that God’s compassion is moved by that doom that awaits this rebellious king. The promise of a peaceful and natural death is all that is promised to him, but at least it means that the Jews who were taken into captivity together with him would respect his memory and would honor him in the way they buried him.

The Hebrew of v.5 reads literally: “But you shall die in peace: and with the burning of your fathers which were the former kings before you, so they shall burn odors for you; and they will lament saying Ah lord!” The Hebrew word for “burning” here is *misraphah*, which is only used here in the Old Testament and in Isaiah, in the verse: “The peoples will be burned as if to lime; like cut thornbushes they will be set ablaze.”³ Although the word seems to refer to cremation, there is no reason to believe that Zedekiah was not interred and that what was burned was incense with the fire that was lit to commemorate him.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on this prophecy of Zedekiah’s peaceful death: “Zedekiah will, it is true, be carried to Babylon, but he will not suffer a violent death; he will ‘die in peace,’ and be buried with all customary royal honors. A difficulty, however, has been felt in admitting this view. How could Zedekiah be said to die in peace, when he was ‘in prison till the day of his death’ (... Jeremiah 52:11)? And how could the deposed king of a captive people be honored with a public mourning? The reply is (1) that, as

1. See Jer. 32:1-5.
2. II Kings 25:6,7
3. Isa. 33:12

compared with a cruel death by flaying or impalement, it was ‘peace’ to live in the obscure quiet of a prison; and (2) that, as the Jews appear to have been left very much to themselves ... it is credible enough that they were allowed to show the customary honors to a deceased representative of David. At any rate, the alternative view seems not in accordance with sound exegesis, viz. that the verse means this, ‘If thou obey the word of the Lord, and surrender thyself to Nebuchadnezzar, thou shalt live and die in peaceable possession of the throne.’ What parallel can be produced for this violent interpretation?”

The proclamation issued in vv.8-11 to free all Hebrew slaves was in obedience to the Law of Moses. The law stated: “These are the laws you are to set before them: If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.”¹ Evidently, this law had never been obeyed, although it was known. As the crisis of Jerusalem heightened under the Babylonian siege, the slave owners decided to let their slaves go free, probably more for practical reasons than out of compassion or a sense of obedience to the Lord. As the siege progressed food supplies diminished. Freedom for slaves meant that the former owner would no longer be under obligation to provide food for his servants. They had to fend for themselves and if they starved it would not be the boss’s responsibility.

The proclamation of liberty for Hebrew slaves was not done in a casual way. The Hebrew words for “making a covenant” are *karath beriyth*, which both have the meaning of making an alliance by cutting up an animal and passing between the pieces. The ritual symbolized what would happen to those who did not keep their promise. They would be cut to pieces as the animal with which they had identified themselves.

The solemn promises were broken when the Egyptian army marched up to relieve Jerusalem, and the Babylonians broke up their siege temporarily. The former slave owners believed that relief was final and revoked their solemn pledge, taking back their slaves, probably by force.

In vv.12-16 God repeats what the slave owners had done, emphasizing the fact that they had involved Him by making their vows in the temple, using His Name. In revoking their pledge, they had insulted the Almighty. Their sin was a double one; they had sinned against God and against their fellowmen. The problem with obedience to the will of God is that, if it is not motivated by love and by the fear of the Lord, it is without real value. Jesus says: “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”² And the Apostle Paul adds: “Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.”³ These slave owners had neither fear of God, nor love for Him; they had simply acted out of expedience. They thought it was most advantageous to do what they did and their act happened to coincide with the law of God. As it turned out it was the most disadvantageous thing they could have done.

One of the problems was that these masters had forgotten their own history. They did not remember that they had been slaves themselves. God reminds them forcefully that He had set them free from slavery in Egypt. The fact that they had not experienced this personally did not make a difference. Those who forget the past are always forced to relive it. A nation that forgets its history has no future. A person who forgets where he came from does not know where he is going either. John Newton became a vibrant saint, because he always remembered “Amazing grace ... that saved a wretch like me!”

With biting sarcasm, using the same Hebrew word they had used for their slaves, *derowr*, “liberty,” God proclaims their freedom, “‘freedom’ to fall by the sword, plague and famine.” This “freedom” is like the break-failure of a car, which spells accidents. This freedom means the exchange of one taskmaster for

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1. Ex. 21:1-4; Deut. 15:12-14
 2. John 14:15
 3. II Cor. 5:11

another. He who does not consider himself to be a slave of Christ is under bondage to the devil. And Satan is the cruelest taskmaster imaginable.

The words of their pledge would return to them. As they made the covenant of freedom for their slaves, having cut the sacrificial animal in two and walked between the pieces, they must have said something like: “If I do not keep this promise, may happen to me what happened to this animal!” And God replies: “The leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, the court officials, the priests and all the people of the land who walked between the pieces of the calf, I will hand over to their enemies who seek their lives. Their dead bodies will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth.” When God made His covenant with Abraham and Abraham had brought some animals that were cut up the seal God’s pledge, birds of prey tried to feed on the carcasses, but Abraham shooed them away.¹ Here the vultures would be allowed to eat their fill.

These slave owners would foreshadow what will happen on the Day of Judgment, when those who ignore God and His Son will be killed by the Word of God, the sword that comes out of the mouth of Christ. As we read in Revelation: “And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.’ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.”²

4. The prophet and the Rechabites 35:1-19

1 This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord during the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah:

2 "Go to the Recabite family and invite them to come to one of the side rooms of the house of the Lord and give them wine to drink."

3 So I went to get Jaazaniah son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons — the whole family of the Rechabites.

4 I brought them into the house of the Lord, into the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah the man of God. It was next to the room of the officials, which was over that of Maaseiah son of Shallum the doorkeeper.

5 Then I set bowls full of wine and some cups before the men of the Recabite family and said to them, "Drink some wine."

6 But they replied, "We do not drink wine, because our forefather Jonadab son of Recab gave us this command: 'Neither you nor your descendants must ever drink wine.'

7 Also you must never build houses, sow seed or plant vineyards; you must never have any of these things, but must always live in tents. Then you will live a long time in the land where you are nomads.'

8 We have obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab son of Recab commanded us. Neither we nor our wives nor our sons and daughters have ever drunk wine

9 or built houses to live in or had vineyards, fields or crops.

10 We have lived in tents and have fully obeyed everything our forefather Jonadab commanded us.

1. See Gen. 15:11.

2. Rev. 19:17-21

11 *But when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon invaded this land, we said, ‘Come, we must go to Jerusalem to escape the Babylonian and Aramean armies.’ So we have remained in Jerusalem.”*

12 *Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, saying:*

13 *“This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Go and tell the men of Judah and the people of Jerusalem, ‘Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words?’ declares the Lord.*

14 *‘Jonadab son of Recab ordered his sons not to drink wine and this command has been kept. To this day they do not drink wine, because they obey their forefather’s command. But I have spoken to you again and again, yet you have not obeyed me.*

15 *Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, “Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions; do not follow other gods to serve them. Then you will live in the land I have given to you and your fathers.” But you have not paid attention or listened to me.*

16 *The descendants of Jonadab son of Recab have carried out the command their forefather gave them, but these people have not obeyed me.’*

17 *“Therefore, this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Listen! I am going to bring on Judah and on everyone living in Jerusalem every disaster I pronounced against them. I spoke to them, but they did not listen; I called to them, but they did not answer.’”*

18 *Then Jeremiah said to the family of the Rechabites, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘You have obeyed the command of your forefather Jonadab and have followed all his instructions and have done everything he ordered.’*

19 *Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me.’”*

The Pulpit Commentary calls this section “The third member of this group of short prophecies,” stating: “In it, Jeremiah points to the faithful obedience of the Rechabites, as putting to shame the infidelity of Judahites. It belongs obviously to the time before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps to the summer of B.C. 606.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states by way of introduction: “Events at the close of Jehoiakim’s reign are reflected here, and verse 11 shows that marauding Aramean and Chaldean forces were ravaging Judah. See 2 Kings 24:2 for reasons for the attacks. While the Babylonians were regrouping after the battle with Egypt in 601 BC, they made sporadic raids on selected sites in Judah between 599 and 597 BC, to which verse 11 refers. Why this chapter and its successors occur here is difficult to determine.” The Scripture reference in II Kings reads: “The Lord sent Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite and Ammonite raiders against him. He sent them to destroy Judah, in accordance with the word of the Lord proclaimed by his servants the prophets.”

The chronology of Jeremiah is one of the mysteries of the Old Testament. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes rather comically: “What strange confusion in the placing of these chapters! Who could have expected to hear of Jehoiakim again, whom we have long ago buried; and we have now arrived in the history at the very last year of the last Jewish king.”

This chapter is an object lesson for the people of Jerusalem and all of Judah. God tells Jeremiah to invite the Rechabites to the temple and serve them wine. *Barnes’ Notes* explains about the Rechabites: “The Rechabites were a nomadic tribe not of Jewish but of Kenite race, and connected with the Amalekites (Num 24:21; 1 Sam 15:6), from whom however they had separated themselves, and made a close alliance with the tribe of Judah (Judg 1:16), on whose southern borders they took up their dwelling (1 Sam 27:10). While, however, the main body of the Kenites gradually adopted settled habits, and dwelt in cities (1 Sam 30:29), the Rechabites persisted in leading the free desert life, and in this determination they were finally confirmed by the influence and authority of Jonadab, who lived in Jehu’s reign. He was a zealous adherent of Yahweh (2 Kings 10:15-17), and possibly a religious reformer; and as the names of the men mentioned in the present narrative are all compounded with Yah, it is plain that the tribe continued their allegiance to Him.” We are not told how many people were involved and whether they were representatives of a larger group or they

were all there was. Since they all fitted into one of the rooms of the temple building, the group cannot have been too large.

The room in which this meeting took place is called “the room of the sons of Hanan son of Igdaliah the man of God.” *Barnes’ Notes* states about this: “The title man of God, i.e., prophet, belongs to Hanan, identified by many with Hanani (2 Chron 16:7). The sons of Hanan were probably his disciples. If so, we find a religious school or sect, regularly established in the precincts of the temple, of whose views and modes of interpretation we know nothing. Plainly however, the Hananites were friendly to Jeremiah, and lent him their hall for his purpose.”

The Rechabites explain to Jeremiah the reason for their refusal to drink the wine set before them as being their pledge of obedience to their ancestor Jonadab. Because of this pledge they lived as nomadic shepherds, not planting vineyards or other fields and living in tents. We are not told for how many generations the tribe had maintained their nomadic lifestyle, but the point of the object lesson is that they remained obedient to their tribal tradition. Based on a verse in II Kings, *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* believes that Jehonadab lived 300 years earlier. The Scripture reference takes us to the time of King Jehu and it reads: “After he left there, he came upon Jehonadab son of Recab, who was on his way to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, ‘Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?’ ‘I am,’ Jehonadab answered.”¹ The commentary states: “They were called Rechabites, not Jonadabites, having received their name from Rechab the father, previously to their adopting the injunctions of Jonadab his son. This case affords no justification for slavish deference to the religious opinions of the Christian fathers; because Jonadab’s injunction only affected matters of the present life; moreover, it was not binding on their consciences, because they deemed it not unlawful to go to Jerusalem in the invasion (Jer 35:11). What is praised here is not the father’s injunction, but the obedience of the sons (Calvin).”

Although none of this is pertinent to the lesson God wanted His people to learn from the Rechabites, it must be observed that their presence in Judah was a remarkable phenomenon. These people were not Israelites, yet they considered themselves partakers of God’s promise to Israel regarding the land of Canaan. As *Barnes’ Notes* observes, they had links with the Amalekites, Israel’s archenemies, about which God had said to Moses that He would completely blot out their memory from under heaven.² They believed God’s promise in connection with the fifth of the Ten Commandments that states: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.”³ Although not members of God’s chosen people, they acted as if they were, and God honored their obedience and treated them as if they were His own, setting them as an example for those who were His own children. Although they were not by nature the heirs of God’s promises, they inherited those promises, while the real heirs were being disinherited. That is the lesson to be drawn from the example God set before Jeremiah. The sons of Jonadab obeyed their earthly father, but the sons of God refused to obey their heavenly Father. God had sent prophets to His people to warn them of the consequences of their idolatry. There had been prophets in every century, warning every generation, but the general tendency, apart from an occasional short period of revival, had been to disregard the warnings. Jerusalem had become, in Jesus’ words, the city that kills the prophets.⁴

God gave the Rechabites a promise similar to the one He had given to David: “Jonadab son of Recab will never fail to have a man to serve me.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “Jonadab son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever.” *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* interprets this to mean: “There shall always be left representatives of the clan to worship me (Jer 15:1,19); or ‘before

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1. II Kings 10:15
 2. See Ex. 17:14.
 3. Ex. 20:12
 4. Matt. 23:37

me' means simple existence, for all things in existence are in God's sight (Ps 89:33). The Rechabites returned from the captivity." The Hebrew for "stand before me" is *'amad paniym*, meaning "stand [before] my face." The commentary states that the words "stand before me" are liturgical. We read: "The tribe of Levi is chosen to 'stand before' the Lord (Deut 10:8; 18:5,7). This meaning, 'ministering before me,' is given in the Targum of Jonathan. The blessing thus will mean, the Rechabites were solemnly adopted into the families of Israel, and incorporated into the tribe of Levi. Their consecrated life gained for them this honor. That they ministered in the temple in the times when the Second Book of Psalms was collected, appears from the title in the Septuagint of Ps 71, 'To David, of the sons of Jonadab, and the first who were taken captive.' A son of Rechab is mentioned in Neh 3:14 as cooperating with the priests, Levites, and princes in restoring the wall. Compare also 1 Chron 2:55, where they appear among 'the scribes,' who doubtless were Levites, after the return from Babylon. Thus it appears the Rechabites were a recognized body in the temple just before the last destruction of Jerusalem."

5. The writing of the scroll 36:1-32

1 In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

2 "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now.

3 Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, each of them will turn from his wicked way; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin."

4 So Jeremiah called Baruch son of Neriah, and while Jeremiah dictated all the words the Lord had spoken to him, Baruch wrote them on the scroll.

5 Then Jeremiah told Baruch, "I am restricted; I cannot go to the Lord's temple.

6 So you go to the house of the Lord on a day of fasting and read to the people from the scroll the words of the Lord that you wrote as I dictated. Read them to all the people of Judah who come in from their towns.

7 Perhaps they will bring their petition before the Lord, and each will turn from his wicked ways, for the anger and wrath pronounced against this people by the Lord are great."

8 Baruch son of Neriah did everything Jeremiah the prophet told him to do; at the Lord's temple he read the words of the Lord from the scroll.

9 In the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, a time of fasting before the Lord was proclaimed for all the people in Jerusalem and those who had come from the towns of Judah.

10 From the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper courtyard at the entrance of the New Gate of the temple, Baruch read to all the people at the Lord's temple the words of Jeremiah from the scroll.

11 When Micaiah son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the Lord from the scroll, 12 he went down to the secretary's room in the royal palace, where all the officials were sitting: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah son of Shemaiah, Elnathan son of Acbor, Gemariah son of Shaphan, Zedekiah son of Hananiah, and all the other officials.

13 After Micaiah told them everything he had heard Baruch read to the people from the scroll,

14 all the officials sent Jehudi son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to say to Baruch, "Bring the scroll from which you have read to the people and come." So Baruch son of Neriah went to them with the scroll in his hand.

15 They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them.

16 When they heard all these words, they looked at each other in fear and said to Baruch, "We must report all these words to the king."

17 Then they asked Baruch, "Tell us, how did you come to write all this? Did Jeremiah dictate it?"

18 "Yes," Baruch replied, "he dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them in ink on the scroll."
19 Then the officials said to Baruch, "You and Jeremiah, go and hide. Don't let anyone know where you are."
20 After they put the scroll in the room of Elishama the secretary, they went to the king in the courtyard and reported everything to him.
21 The king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and Jehudi brought it from the room of Elishama the secretary and read it to the king and all the officials standing beside him.
22 It was the ninth month and the king was sitting in the winter apartment, with a fire burning in the firepot in front of him.
23 Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire.
24 The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes.
25 Even though Elnathan, Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.
26 Instead, the king commanded Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah son of Azriel and Shelemiah son of Abdeel to arrest Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet. But the Lord had hidden them.
27 After the king burned the scroll containing the words that Baruch had written at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:
28 "Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up.
29 Also tell Jehoiakim king of Judah, 'This is what the Lord says: You burned that scroll and said, "Why did you write on it that the king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy this land and cut off both men and animals from it?"'
30 Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night.
31 I will punish him and his children and his attendants for their wickedness; I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened.'
32 So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, gives the following background information about this chapter: "The first scroll was dictated in 605/4 BC, a year in which the Babylonians won a decisive victory over Egypt. Perhaps the onset of calamity precipitated the compilation of the oracles in the hope that Judah would repent. The scroll was probably a parchment of book-length (*cf.* Ps. 40:7; Ezk. 2:9). Ancient Hebrew books had their text written in parallel columns, necessitating the unrolling of the scroll as the reading proceeded. The actual contents of the document in question are unknown, though it probably comprised an anthology of material proclaimed between 626 and 605 BC. As compared with the extant prophecy it was evidently fairly short, since it could be read three times in one day (verses 10, 15, 21)."

The Pulpit Commentary introduces this chapter with the following interesting observation: "In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (which, it is important to remember, was the first of Nebuchadnezzar) Jeremiah was directed to write down all his previous revelations, from the beginning of his ministry to the present day. Such, at least, is the literal meaning of vers. 1, 2; but it would seem that the literal meaning can hardly be the right one. First of all, a historically accurate reproduction of the prophecies would not have suited Jeremiah's object, which was not historical, but practical; he desired to give a salutary shock to the people by bringing before them the fatal consequences of their evil deeds. And next, it appears from ver. 29 that the purport of the roll which the king burned was that the King of Babylon should 'come and destroy this land;'

whereas it is clear that Jeremiah had uttered many other important declarations in the course of his already long ministry. Now, it is remarkable, and points the way to a solution of the problem, that ch. 25. is said (ver. 1) to have been written in the very same year to which the narrative before us refers, and that it is mainly concerned with the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar and its consequences (indeed, entirely so, if we admit that ... Jeremiah 25:12, 26 have received interpolation). Is not *this* the prophecy which Jeremiah dictated to Baruch? and is not ver. 2 a loose, inaccurate statement due to a later editor? That the prophetic as well as the historical books have passed through various phases (without detriment to their religious value) is becoming more and more evident. The seventh and eighth chapters of Isaiah, and the thirty-seventh and thirty-eighth of the same book, have demonstrably been brought into their present shape by an editor ... is it not highly reasonable to conjecture that these narrative chapters of Jeremiah have, to a greater or less extent, passed through a similar process?"

One of the interesting points in this story is that we learn something about the preservation of Jeremiah's prophecies, most of which must have been given orally. Although the purpose of the writing was not preservation, the fact that Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch, did write down the prophet's words forms obviously the basis of the book of Jeremiah which is now part of the Old Testament canon.

The reason given for the dictation here, however, was that Jeremiah was "restricted" from going to the temple and he wanted Baruch to accurately proclaim the message the Lord had given him. The Hebrew word, rendered "restricted," is *`atsar*, which literally means "shut up." The first time *`atsar* is used in Scripture is when Sarah says to Abraham: "The Lord has *kept* me from having children," meaning that the Lord had "shut up" Sarah's womb. Jeremiah uses *`atsar* two more times in his book; once in: "But if I say, 'I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire *shut up* in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot."¹ And once in: "While Jeremiah had been *confined* in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him..."² We are not told the reason for which Jeremiah was kept from going to the temple himself. Some Bible scholars believe that the prophet may have foreseen the consequences the reading of the message would have upon King Jehoiakim. He may have thought that Baruch would be in less danger as he was not the author of the scroll. It could also be that Jeremiah was kept away by some ritual impurity which would make it a sin for him to present himself before the Lord in the house of the Lord.

The day chosen for the reading of the scroll was a day of fasting. V.9 also speaks of a day of fasting, without elaborating about the reason. Some Bible scholars believe that v.9 is out of place, as the date was not one of the fasts prescribed in the Old Testament. Others believe that the fast was proclaimed in connection with threats of a Babylonian invasion. If the latter is the case, the reading of Jeremiah's prophecy highlights the dichotomy. On the one hand the people sought the Lord to avoid disaster, on the other they had no intention to give up their idolatrous lifestyle.

The reading took place "from the room of Gemariah son of Shaphan the secretary." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about Gemariah: "*Gemariah* was the son of Shaphan, who had been Secretary of State under Josiah (2 Ki. 22:3,8). If this Shaphan is to be identified with the man mention in Jeremiah 26:24, Gemariah would then be the brother of Ahikam who treated Jeremiah kindly."

The Pulpit Commentary observes about "the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim": "It is remarkable that the Septuagint has here the *eighth* year; and Josephus, too, relates that Jehoiakim paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar in his eighth year. This latter statement seems to tally with the notices in 2 Kings 24. The vassalage of Jehoiakim is there said to have lasted three years; this followed the rebellion; while the siege of Jerusalem was reserved for the short reign of Jehoiachin. Now, as this siege must have been the punishment of Jehoiakim's rebellion, and as the reign of the latter king lasted eleven years, we are brought to the same date as that given by Josephus for the commencement of the vassalage, viz. the eighth year. It is to

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1. Jer. 20:9
 2. Jer. 39:15

this year, then, that ... 2 Kings 24:1 refers when it says, ‘In his days Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant;’ and also the narrative before us in the statement that ‘they proclaimed a fast before Jehovah to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem.’ What other event would have produced such a concourse of worshippers? The battle of Carchemish (which took place in the fourth year of Jehoiakim)? But it was by no means clear as yet that the consequences of this would be disastrous for Judah. Carchemish was too far off for the people of Judah to show such serious alarm.”

Vv.11-19 record what happened immediately after Baruch read Jeremiah’s scroll in public. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on this: “Since Gemariah was attending a conclave of ruling dignitaries at the time (12), he may well have instructed his son to report on the nature and content of the reading. If Elishama the Secretary can be identified with the Elishama of Jeremiah 41:1 and 2 Kings 25:25, he was of royal descent. *Elnathan* ben Achbor was mentioned again in Jeremiah 26:22, but of the others, apart from Gemariah ben Shaphan, nothing is known. *Yehudi* ben Nethaniah ben Shelemiah ben Cushi, otherwise unknown, must have been of some importance in his day, otherwise his ancestry would not have been traced to the third generation. In bidding him be seated the rulers were evidently displaying friendship towards Baruch, who may himself have come from an upper-class family. His polite reception may indicate that Jeremiah had some following among the rulers of Judah. Their apprehensive reception of the scroll made it virtually mandatory for the king to hear about it immediately. The genuine nature of the document was attested by Baruch, who himself wrote it in ink. Then the rulers became concerned for the safety of Jeremiah and Baruch, obviously profiting from the aftermath of Uriah’s utterances (26:23), as indicated by the fact that Alnathan ben Achbor, who had extradited Uriah (26:20–23), was present on this occasion. Jewish tradition has identified the place of concealment with the so-called ‘Grotto of Jeremiah,’ located outside the Damascus Gate, though with what accuracy is uncertain.”

The concern of these men regarding the safety of Jeremiah and Baruch is an indication of the notoriety of king Jehoiakim. They had good reason for this as the incident with Uriah, already mentioned by Harrison, proves. We read earlier about him: “King Jehoiakim, however, sent Elnathan son of Achbor to Egypt, along with some other men. They brought Uriah out of Egypt and took him to King Jehoiakim, who had him struck down with a sword and his body thrown into the burial place of the common people. Furthermore, Ahikam son of Shaphan supported Jeremiah, and so he was not handed over to the people to be put to death.”¹

After Jeremiah and Baruch had left, the officials who had heard the contents of the scroll read to them placed the scroll in the secretaries’ room. They may have hoped that the king would pay no attention to the message that would be passed on to him orally, so that the scroll would simply be filed away. It would, however, have been dangerous not to inform the king of the scroll’s existence, so those responsible briefed his majesty. The king insisted upon seeing the scroll himself and he sent Jehudi to fetch the scroll and read it to him. We read that it was the ninth month of the year, which *The Living Bible* interprets as December. *The New Living Translation* puts it at “late autumn.” It was obviously the colder time of the year and the rainy season. We read in Ezra: “Within the three days, all the men of Judah and Benjamin had gathered in Jerusalem. And on the twentieth day of the ninth month, all the people were sitting in the square before the house of God, greatly distressed by the occasion and because of the rain.”² It was cold enough to have a fire lit in the room where the king was sitting. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* explains that the king was in: “A warm apartment suited to the season of the year, (December,) when in Palestine there is often snow upon the ground, though it does not last long. A fire on the hearth - a pan or brazier of burning coals. This is the case to the present day. In cold weather the rich burn wood in brass or earthen pans, placed in any part of the room; the indigent burn sticks on the floor.”

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1. Jer. 26:22-24
 2. Ezra 10:9

As the scroll was being read, the king cut off sections of three or four columns, which would amount to pieces of 50 or 60 inches, and threw them in the open fire, thus displaying total disregard for the written Word of God. He not only showed complete disrespect for the message but also for the God who inspired it. How different was Jehoiakim's response to the Word of God from what his father's had been when he heard the text of the scroll that had been discovered in the temple during the restoration of the building. We read about King Josiah: "When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes. He gave these orders to Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Acbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 'Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the Lord's anger that burns against us because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written there concerning us.'"¹ Here we read: "The king and all his attendants who heard all these words showed no fear, nor did they tear their clothes." Some of those who had assisted at the first reading in the room of Gemariah voiced objection to the king's behavior, but they were ignored. The king issued an arrest warrant for Jeremiah and Baruch. Had they been captured, they would undoubtedly have suffered the same fate as Uriah.

No single act symbolized more blatantly the people's attitude of rebellion than King Jehoiakim's burning of the scroll. His way of behaving toward the written Word of God showed that he had no fear of God in him. And that for a man whose name means "Yahweh will establish"!

God instructs Jeremiah to write another scroll with the same content and some additions. The additions may be what is stated about Jehoiakim's death and burial. Jeremiah had earlier prophesied about this, saying: "Therefore this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah: 'They will not mourn for him: "Alas, my brother! Alas, my sister!" They will not mourn for him: "Alas, my master! Alas, his splendor!" He will have the burial of a donkey — dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem.'"² There is no scriptural record of Jehoiakim's end. Although his son, Jehoiachin reigned briefly in Jerusalem, that short period of three months is not taken into consideration. It is true that none of the latter's children ever became a reigning monarch over Israel. Jeremiah had, at another place pronounced the same sentence about Jehoiachin's descendants: "Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Lord says: 'Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.'"³

6. Jeremiah's prediction and his subsequent imprisonment 37:1-21

1 Zedekiah son of Josiah was made king of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he reigned in place of Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim.

2 Neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.

3 King Zedekiah, however, sent Jehucal son of Shelemiah with the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah to Jeremiah the prophet with this message: "Please pray to the Lord our God for us."

4 Now Jeremiah was free to come and go among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison.

5 Pharaoh's army had marched out of Egypt, and when the Babylonians who were besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem.

6 Then the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet:

1. II Kings 22:11-13
2. Jer. 22:18,19
3. Jer. 22:28,29

7 *"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of me, 'Pharaoh's army, which has marched out to support you, will go back to its own land, to Egypt.*
8 *Then the Babylonians will return and attack this city; they will capture it and burn it down.'*
9 *"This is what the Lord says: Do not deceive yourselves, thinking, 'The Babylonians will surely leave us.' They will not!*
10 *Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army that is attacking you and only wounded men were left in their tents, they would come out and burn this city down."*
11 *After the Babylonian army had withdrawn from Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army,*
12 *Jeremiah started to leave the city to go to the territory of Benjamin to get his share of the property among the people there.*
13 *But when he reached the Benjamin Gate, the captain of the guard, whose name was Irijah son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah, arrested him and said, "You are deserting to the Babylonians!"*
14 *"That's not true!" Jeremiah said. "I am not deserting to the Babylonians." But Irijah would not listen to him; instead, he arrested Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.*
15 *They were angry with Jeremiah and had him beaten and imprisoned in the house of Jonathan the secretary, which they had made into a prison.*
16 *Jeremiah was put into a vaulted cell in a dungeon, where he remained a long time.*
17 *Then King Zedekiah sent for him and had him brought to the palace, where he asked him privately, "Is there any word from the Lord?" "Yes," Jeremiah replied, "you will be handed over to the king of Babylon."*
18 *Then Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah, "What crime have I committed against you or your officials or this people, that you have put me in prison?"*
19 *Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, 'The king of Babylon will not attack you or this land'?*
20 *But now, my lord the king, please listen. Let me bring my petition before you: Do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, or I will die there."*
21 *King Zedekiah then gave orders for Jeremiah to be placed in the courtyard of the guard and given bread from the street of the bakers each day until all the bread in the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.*

The lack of chronologic consistency in this book makes it sometimes difficult to place the events recorded in their right sequence. The fact that the following occurred during the reign of Zedekiah means that Nebuchadnezzar had already taken an important section of the population, including King Jehoiakin, into captivity. In *Second Kings* we read: "Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive to Babylon. He also took from Jerusalem to Babylon the king's mother, his wives, his officials and the leading men of the land. The king of Babylon also deported to Babylon the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, strong and fit for war, and a thousand craftsmen and artisans. He made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah."¹

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "Two incidents from 589–588 BC are narrated here. Perhaps in the spring of 588 BC news arrived of an approaching Egyptian relief force, and accordingly the Babylonians lifted the siege of Jerusalem for a short period to meet the new military threat. The besieged inhabitants consequently experienced a respite which many hoped would be permanent."

We read earlier that King Zedekiah had sent some of his envoys to Jeremiah to inquire about what God was planning to do with the kingdom of Judah. In chapter 21 we read: "The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord when King Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur son of Malkijah and the priest Zephaniah son of Maaseiah. They said: 'Inquire now of the Lord for us because Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is attacking

1. II Kings 24:15-17

us. Perhaps the Lord will perform wonders for us as in times past so that he will withdraw from us.”¹ Chapters 32-34 also pertain to this period but at a later stage when the Babylonian siege had reached its final stage. At the beginning of this chapter Jeremiah had not yet been put in prison. And his effort to leave the city cannot be connected to the purchase of land recorded in chapters 32-34, since that event had not yet taken place.

At the time this chapter opens the Babylonian army had temporarily withdrawn from Jerusalem to face the threat of the oncoming Egyptian army. It was during this period of relief that Zedekiah contacted Jeremiah anew with the request to pray for the city. The ironic part of this communication is that we are informed that “neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet.” We can therefore hardly assume that Zedekiah was serious in wanting to know the will of the Lord at this time. The absence of the Babylonian army seemed to prove that Jeremiah had been wrong.

Jeremiah’s reply was more than an effort to justify his previous prophecies; it was an announcement of judgment to the king and the whole population of the city. The defeat of the Egyptian army is predicted and the return of the Babylonians in such a force that all hope for the salvation of Jerusalem goes out of the window. V.10 serves the purpose of showing how invincible the Babylonians would be. Even if Zedekiah would be able to fight them off and win the battle against them, he would yet lose the war. The wording matches in irony the king’s request for intercessory prayer; neither statement should be taken literally.

Vv.11-21 describe Jeremiah’s arrest as he tried to leave the city to go to his hometown Anathoth. Bible scholars disagree about the interpretation of v.12. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people.” The problem is the Hebrew word *chalaq*, which literally means: “to be smooth.” It can also mean: “to apportion,” “to separate,” or “to take away a portion.” The most common use in the Old Testament is in the sense of “to divide,” as in the verse: “During the night Abram *divided* his men to attack them and he routed them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus.”² But it is also used in: “Ahaz *took* some of the things from the temple of the Lord and from the royal palace and from the princes and presented them to the king of Assyria, but that did not help him.”³ *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The Hebrew is difficult to construe. It is often translated to receive his portion there. The portion could not be the land referred to in Jer 32:8, for the events of that chapter had not yet taken place. Probably he was bound for Anathoth.” *Barnes’ Notes* supposes that it was “to receive a share thence.” The commentary states: “When the siege was temporarily raised, the first object would be food, and, accordingly, Jeremiah accompanied by others, who, like himself, had a right to share in the produce of the priests’ lands at Anathoth, started there to see whether any stores remained which might be available for their common use.”

As Jeremiah was leaving the city through the Benjamin Gate, he was arrested on suspicion of wanting to desert to the Babylonians. Jeremiah’s prophecies had been misinterpreted as if Jeremiah was pro-Babylonian. It ought to have been clear that Jeremiah always considered the Babylonians to be the enemy. But the only conclusion the people had drawn from Jeremiah’s warnings and from his advice to surrender to the Babylonians, had been that Jeremiah was unpatriotic.

Irijah who arrested Jeremiah probably had a personal gripe with Jeremiah. He was the grandson of the false prophet Hananiah, about whom Jeremiah had prophesied that he would die. We read earlier: “Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, ‘Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore, this is what the Lord says: ‘I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against

1. Jer. 21:1,2
2. Gen. 14:15
3. II Chron. 28:21

the Lord.” In the seventh month of that same year, Hananiah the prophet died.”¹ Irijah may have long looked for an opportunity to avenge himself upon Jeremiah for the death of his grandfather.

There seems to have been a court case in which Jeremiah was beaten and condemned to imprisonment. *The New International Version* states that Jeremiah was put in “a vaulted cell in a dungeon.” While he was pining away there the Babylonian army must have returned to resume the siege, because we learn that at one point all the bread in the city was gone.

When the Babylonian army returned and resumed the siege, King Zedekiah begins to realize the seriousness of his condition. There is now no ironic request as in v.3. But the king lacked the courage to invite Jeremiah for an open audience and to ask him questions in the presence of his courtiers. *The New International Version* reports that the king asked him privately “Is there any word from the Lord?” The Hebrew word used is *cether*, which is consistently translated “secret.” The secrecy of this audience reveals the weakness of this man’s character. He is more afraid of his own counselors than of God. Jeremiah’s answer is blunt but it has the sharpness of a sword. As we will read later, Jeremiah did counsel the king to surrender to the Babylonians in order to save his own life and to spare the city of being burned to the ground, but that was not until a later, more desperate stage of the siege. The audience ends with Jeremiah’s request not to be returned to the dungeon under Jonathan’s house. What the conditions of that place were is evident from Jeremiah’s fear that he would die there. So Jeremiah was moved to the courtyard where the transaction with his cousin Hananel must have taken place later.²

7. The prophet is imprisoned, released and interviewed by Zedekiah 38:1-28

1 Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah heard what Jeremiah was telling all the people when he said,

2 "This is what the Lord says: 'Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. He will escape with his life; he will live.'

3 And this is what the Lord says: 'This city will certainly be handed over to the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.'"

4 Then the officials said to the king, "This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers who are left in this city, as well as all the people, by the things he is saying to them. This man is not seeking the good of these people but their ruin."

5 "He is in your hands," King Zedekiah answered. "The king can do nothing to oppose you."

6 So they took Jeremiah and put him into the cistern of Malkijah, the king’s son, which was in the courtyard of the guard. They lowered Jeremiah by ropes into the cistern; it had no water in it, only mud, and Jeremiah sank down into the mud.

7 But Ebed-Melech, a Cushite, an official in the royal palace, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern. While the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate,

8 Ebed-Melech went out of the palace and said to him,

9 "My lord the king, these men have acted wickedly in all they have done to Jeremiah the prophet. They have thrown him into a cistern, where he will starve to death when there is no longer any bread in the city."

10 Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Cushite, "Take thirty men from here with you and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies."

11 So Ebed-Melech took the men with him and went to a room under the treasury in the palace. He took some old rags and worn-out clothes from there and let them down with ropes to Jeremiah in the cistern.

1. Jer. 28:15-17

2. See Jer. 32-34.

12 Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so,

13 and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard.

14 Then King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and had him brought to the third entrance to the temple of the Lord. "I am going to ask you something," the king said to Jeremiah. "Do not hide anything from me."

15 Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "If I give you an answer, will you not kill me? Even if I did give you counsel, you would not listen to me."

16 But King Zedekiah swore this oath secretly to Jeremiah: "As surely as the Lord lives, who has given us breath, I will neither kill you nor hand you over to those who are seeking your life."

17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.

18 But if you will not surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, this city will be handed over to the Babylonians and they will burn it down; you yourself will not escape from their hands.'"

19 King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me."

20 "They will not hand you over," Jeremiah replied. "Obey the Lord by doing what I tell you. Then it will go well with you, and your life will be spared.

21 But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the Lord has revealed to me:

22 All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you: "They misled you and overcame you — those trusted friends of yours. Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.'

23 "All your wives and children will be brought out to the Babylonians. You yourself will not escape from their hands but will be captured by the king of Babylon; and this city will be burned down."

24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die. 25 If the officials hear that I talked with you, and they come to you and say, 'Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; do not hide it from us or we will kill you,'

26 then tell them, 'I was pleading with the king not to send me back to Jonathan's house to die there.'"

27 All the officials did come to Jeremiah and question him, and he told them everything the king had ordered him to say. So they said no more to him, for no one had heard his conversation with the king.

28 And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard until the day Jerusalem was captured.

In introducing this chapter, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "The chronology of this chapter presents difficulties because of the similarities with 37:11–21. In both accounts Jeremiah is charged with treason and imprisoned (37:15,20; 38:6,26). Both chapters speak of a secret interview with the king, and both end with Jeremiah being placed in the palace stockade. There are differences in the two accounts, however, including the description of the rescue in chapter 38, the actual location of Jeremiah's incarceration, and the fact that Zedekiah had sufficient authority to prevent the prophet's summary execution on a charge of treason. Perhaps this chapter is an expanded form of chapter 37, though it could refer equally well to an entirely separate incident, since Jeremiah was no stranger to the wrath of his fellows." We to consider the incident described here to be a different one from the one mentioned previously.

Since Jeremiah spoke publicly, it seems strange that Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah are mentioned separately as those who heard the message. The meaning is obviously that they were part of the palace staff and that they had immediate access to the king, which enabled them to report what was being said to his majesty. We do not

know who Shephatiah was, but Gedaliah and Jehucal are mentioned earlier as the king's envoys to Jeremiah.¹

Jeremiah's divine message is interpreted as an encouragement to the people to commit treason. We can certainly understand that, under the circumstances, Jeremiah's words were considered to weaken the moral of the people under siege. If Jeremiah himself was arrested while trying to leave the city before it was under siege, how much more would others be under suspicion if they tried to climb the wall during the siege. Jeremiah's words would, in fact, be treason if it were not for the fact that they were an inspired prophecy and that the siege was God's answer to the idolatrous practices of the people. Surrender to the Babylonians would be the equivalent of repentance and surrender to the Lord. But no one in Jerusalem considered that at this point.

Reading King Zedekiah's answer to the three who report Jeremiah's message to him and who suggest that Jeremiah be put to death, makes one wonder who is king and who is servant. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes pertinently: "Poor weak prince! you respect the prophet, you fear the cabal, and you sacrifice an innocent man to your own weakness and their malice!" Zedekiah, who was sympathetic to Jeremiah, had no resemblance of the king Solomon describes in Proverbs: "A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but a wise man will appease it,"² and: "A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life."³ Zedekiah was no roaring lion.

The capital punishment these officials executed upon the prophet took the most cruel form imaginable. Instead of using the sword, they lowered Jeremiah in a cistern without water, but filled with mud. The prophet would slowly sink in the mud and be swallowed up by it. One of the reasons for choosing this way of killing was probably that there was some fear of the public. Jeremiah must have been more popular than these men liked and they may have been afraid of some uproar if they had executed the prophet publicly. In this Jeremiah also foreshadowed the Christ. When the Sanhedrin plotted Jesus' execution, we read: "Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. 'But not during the Feast,' they said, 'or there may be a riot among the people.'"⁴ As with Jesus' crucifixion, the execution of Jeremiah might have received more popular support than these men anticipated. The public liked to see blood. But God had other plans for His prophet.

Vv.11-13 describe Jeremiah's rescue through the mediation of Ebed-Melech. Ebed-Melech was a Cushite. His name means "the king's slave." He was probably a black man from Ethiopia and, as most Bible scholars assume, a eunuch in charge of the king's harem. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Already, even at this early time, God wished to show what good reason there was for calling the Gentiles to salvation. An Ethiopian stranger saves the prophet whom his own countrymen, the Jews, tried to destroy. So the Gentiles believed in Christ, whereas the Jews, his own countrymen, crucified Him; and Ethiopians were among the earliest converts (Acts 2:10,41)."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, explains the easy access Ebed-Melech had to the king: "The king was evidently settling legal matters at the Benjamin Gate, making it easy for Ebed-melech to speak to him. The suggestion that food supplies were exhausted was somewhat exaggerated in the heat of the moment, since stocks lasted until just before the city fell (52:6f). The *thirty men* of verse 10 could easily be emended to three, a more realistic number, by reading *slsh* for *sism*, which might have been the original form." On the other hand, "thirty men" makes sense, considering the strong opposition to Jeremiah from the side of those who had prevailed upon Zedekiah to approve his execution.

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1. Jer. 37:3
 2. Prov. 16:14
 3. Prov. 20:2
 4. Matt. 26:3-5

Ebed-Melech evinced considerable courage as well compassion as in going to the king and speaking out in favor of Jeremiah. He must have been aware of the influence those who opposed Jeremiah had upon the king. The incident also reveals Zedekiah's weakness of character. He appears to go whatever way the wind blows. He must, however, have been favorably inclined to Ebed-Melech's request because of his own sympathy and respect for Jeremiah.

Jeremiah's rescue, by putting ropes under his arms and pulling him up, reveals how desperate his condition was. His body was probably already partly sunken in the mud and pulling him out required a great deal of effort. As *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Ebed-melech was rewarded for his faith, love, and courage, exhibited at a time when he might well fear the wrath of the princes, to which even the king had to yield (Jer 39:16-18)."

In vv.14-28 we read that Zedekiah summoned Jeremiah. This is the second time Zedekiah and Jeremiah met face to face. It must have taken Zedekiah some courage to send for the prophet this time after previously having acquiesced to his execution. He cannot have expected much respect from the prophet. And Jeremiah did not show the respect a subject usually demonstrates to his monarch during this audience. In this conversation Jeremiah prefigured once again Jesus. When our Lord was before the Sanhedrin, we read: "'If you are the Christ,' they said, 'tell us.' Jesus answered, 'If I tell you, you will not believe me, and if I asked you, you would not answer.'"¹

Zedekiah promised Jeremiah that he would not be killed, whatever he would tell the king. This promise was confirmed by an oath. The question is how valuable were the king's oaths? He had sworn an oath in God's Name to King Nebuchadnezzar, promising to submit, an oath he had already broken in his rebellion.²

Jeremiah gave the king the Lord's message, telling him that his only salvation and the salvation of the people and the city of Jerusalem would be in surrendering to the Babylonians. The king's excuse that he would be maltreated by the Jews who were already taken into captivity seems the weakest excuse possible. Given the awesome choice between the welfare of the people and the city and his own loss of face in Babylon, the king chooses to save face. Zedekiah would rather sacrifice everyone, including his own family, than face the possibility of encountering insult from those with whom he would be in prison in Babylon.

Jeremiah's description of what would happen to Zedekiah's harem is replete with sarcasm. Nebuchadnezzar's officers would rape the women and the women would mock him by seeing him in the cistern from which Jeremiah had been pulled.

The audience ends with Zedekiah's request to Jeremiah to keep the meeting secret. Again, the king appeared to be more afraid of what his lackeys would think of him than of God's evaluation of his life. But at least, Jeremiah was not again thrown into the quicksand that would have taken his life.

8. Jerusalem falls and Judah is taken captive 39:1-18

1 This is how Jerusalem was taken: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army and laid siege to it.

2 And on the ninth day of the fourth month of Zedekiah's eleventh year, the city wall was broken through.

3 Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and took seats in the Middle Gate: Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officials of the king of Babylon.

4 When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled; they left the city at night by way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls, and headed toward the Arabah.

1. Luke 22:67,68

2. See II Chron. 36:13.

5 But the Babylonian army pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. They captured him and took him to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him.

6 There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes and also killed all the nobles of Judah.

7 Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes and bound him with bronze shackles to take him to Babylon.

8 The Babylonians set fire to the royal palace and the houses of the people and broke down the walls of Jerusalem.

9 Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard carried into exile to Babylon the people who remained in the city, along with those who had gone over to him, and the rest of the people.

10 But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields.

11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had given these orders about Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard:

12 "Take him and look after him; don't harm him but do for him whatever he asks."

13 So Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, Nebushazban a chief officer, Nergal-Sharezer a high official and all the other officers of the king of Babylon

14 sent and had Jeremiah taken out of the courtyard of the guard. They turned him over to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, to take him back to his home. So he remained among his own people.

15 While Jeremiah had been confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the Lord came to him: 16 "Go and tell Ebed-Melech the Cushite, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am about to fulfill my words against this city through disaster, not prosperity. At that time they will be fulfilled before your eyes.

17 But I will rescue you on that day, declares the Lord; you will not be handed over to those you fear.

18 I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the Lord.'"

The report of the fall of Jerusalem is also given in II Kings 25:1-12 and repeated in Jer. 52:4-16. We should look first at the last section of this chapter, vv.15-18. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about this: "This portion is out of strict chronological order, coming logically after 38:28, when Jeremiah had spoken privately with Zedekiah. At a critical time Ebed-Melech had protested successfully to the king about the conditions of Jeremiah's imprisonment, and for this courageous act he was to be rewarded with a promise of future security. Since Jeremiah was confined in the stockade at this time, he could hardly *go* in a strictly literal sense. Ebed-Melech was afraid of being punished by those who wanted revenge on a palace menial for his implied accusations of evil behavior on their part (38:9). However, his trust in God proved to be his salvation."

The chronology of this chapter presents other problems about which *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This chapter is very confused as it stands. To restore order it is absolutely necessary to suppose that some passages (viz. vers. 1, 2, and vers. 4-13) have been inserted by after thoughts. It is important to notice that the latter of these passages is omitted in the Septuagint. We need not go so far as to excise them altogether, but we must at any rate enclose them in parentheses. The chapter then becomes a narrative of the solemn session held by the Babylonian officers in the 'middle gate,' and the charge which they gave to Gedaliah to take Jeremiah under his protection. Vers. 1, 2 appear to be taken from ... 2 Kings 25:1-4 (...Jeremiah 52:4-7); vers. 4-10 to be shortened from ... 2 Kings 25:4-12 (... Jeremiah 52:7-16). It is difficult to believe that Jeremiah himself made these insertions, not merely because they interrupt the sense, but because they involve several historical difficulties. According to ... Jeremiah 38:28, Jeremiah 'abode in the court of the watch till the day that Jerusalem was taken;' but the *prima facie* meaning of our vers. 13, 14 is that Nebuzar-adan sent to liberate Jeremiah, and yet, according to ... 2 Kings 25:8 (... Jeremiah 52:12), this officer did not arrive at Jerusalem till a month after its capture. Another difficulty is that, according to

ver. 14, Jeremiah was set free by order of Nebuzar-adan, whereas ... Jeremiah 40:1-5 states distinctly that Jeremiah had been taken in fetters to Ramah, where he was liberated by Nebuzar-adan himself. Even if there should be some reasonable way of harmonizing these various statements ... yet is it likely that Jeremiah himself used such inconsistent language? Still, the notice in vers. 11, 12 is in itself not improbable, and the spelling ‘Nebuchad-rezzar’ separates it from the rest of the passage (vers. 4-13); it is possible, therefore, that, in spite of its omission in the Septuagint (which wrongly retains vers. 1, 2), they are the work of Jeremiah.”

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about vv.3-8: “A large clay prism found at Babylon, which lists high officials of the Babylonian court, helps us to understand these names. Three persons are mentioned: Nergal-Sharezer (whose office is) Samgar (meaning unknown); Nebo-Sarsekim (whose office is) Rab-saris (chief of the eunuchs-a high office); and Nergal-Sharezer (whose office is) Rab-mag (meaning unknown); Nergal-Sharezer was Nebuchadnezzar’s son-in-law and second successor.”

The siege of Jerusalem lasted eighteen months, from January in the ninth year of Zedekiah’s reign through July in his twelfth year. Some Bible scholars believe that this siege was briefly lifted when the Egyptian army marched into Palestine, but it could be that this incident happened at another time. Evidently, King Nebuchadnezzar was personally present at the beginning of the siege, but at the end he appears to have moved to Riblah.

The Babylonians succeeded to breach the city wall, probably on the eastern side of the city, since Zedekiah and his troops broke through the wall and fled west toward the Jordan valley. We may assume that the Babylonians opened the city gates from the inside and Nebuchadnezzar’s generals installed themselves and took up their positions “at the middle gate.”

Zedekiah and those with him were captured in the vicinity of Jericho and brought to Riblah to stand trial before Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah’s sentence was swift and cruel. He was forced to see the execution of his own sons as well as of his officers and after that his eyes were taken out. Zedekiah would live for the rest of his life with the last scene he would ever see. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The Assyrian sculptures depict the delight with which the kings struck out, often with their own hands, the eyes of captive princes. This passage reconciles Jer 32:4 – ‘his eyes shall behold his eyes’ - with Ezek 12:13, ‘he shall not see Babylon, though he shall die there.’”

According to chapter 52, the destruction of Jerusalem and carrying away of the people into captivity did not occur until one month after the city had been captured.¹ The delay may be due to the fact that Nebuzaradan had to wait for instructions from Nebuchadnezzar who was in Riblah. “Commander of the imperial guard” is the translation of the Hebrew words *rab tabbach*, which literally mean: “chief butcher.” He was the king’s hangman or executioner. Nebuzaradan was given the charge to burn the city and break down the city walls as well as overseeing the sending off of most of the inhabitants into captivity.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.9 and 10: “At the end of verse 9 the MT reading *the rest of the people who were left* seems to be a mistaken scribal repetition, and should be corrected from 52:15 to read, ‘the residue of skilled craftsmen.’ Only peasants who seemed unlikely to cause the Babylonians much trouble were left behind (10), and to them were allotted holdings in the hill country. The word translated *field* in EVV (*y^egeebiyim*) is of doubtful meaning, with the Vulgate reading *g^ebiym* (‘cisterns’). It is uncertain if the reading should be modified in the light of 52:16 to read, ‘to be vinedressers and husbandmen.’ (*l^ekor^emiym uwlyog^ebiym*).”

It is interesting to note from vv.11-14 that King Nebuchadnezzar was knowledgeable about Jeremiah and his prophecies. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* notes: “Jeremiah’s prophecies were known to Nebuchadnezzar through deserters (Jer 39:9; 38:19); also through the Jews carried to Babylon with Jeconiah (cf. Jer 40:2). Hence, the king’s kindness to him.”

1. See Jer. 52:12,13.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about the treatment given to Jeremiah: “God’s prophet was now released and treated with great deference, his arrest evidently having been based on ignorance of who he was. The superstitious Mesopotamians treated Jeremiah, as a man of God, with the same respect and deference as that accorded their own seers in Babylonia, and he was placed in the care of Gedaliah ben Ahikam ben Shaphan (14), later made governor over the remnants of the populace (*cf.* 40:5). Jeremiah and Gedaliah lived at Mizpah initially, being joined by some deserters from the forces of Judah. The latter were granted asylum there on condition that they did not revolt (40:7–12). A hostile Ammonite king plotted Gedaliah’s assassination about 582 BC (2 Ki. 25:25; Je. 41:1–3). God had honored His promise to deliver Jeremiah (*cf.* 1:8), saving him when others were being destroyed.”

9. Jeremiah remains in Judah with Gedaliah 40:1-16

1 The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had released him at Ramah. He had found Jeremiah bound in chains among all the captives from Jerusalem and Judah who were being carried into exile to Babylon.

2 When the commander of the guard found Jeremiah, he said to him, "The Lord your God decreed this disaster for this place.

3 And now the Lord has brought it about; he has done just as he said he would. All this happened because you people sinned against the Lord and did not obey him.

4 But today I am freeing you from the chains on your wrists. Come with me to Babylon, if you like, and I will look after you; but if you do not want to, then don't come. Look, the whole country lies before you; go wherever you please."

5 However, before Jeremiah turned to go, Nebuzaradan added, "Go back to Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon has appointed over the towns of Judah, and live with him among the people, or go anywhere else you please." Then the commander gave him provisions and a present and let him go.

6 So Jeremiah went to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah and stayed with him among the people who were left behind in the land.

7 When all the army officers and their men who were still in the open country heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the land and had put him in charge of the men, women and children who were the poorest in the land and who had not been carried into exile to Babylon,

8 they came to Gedaliah at Mizpah — Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of the Maacathite, and their men.

9 Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, took an oath to reassure them and their men. "Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians," he said. "Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you.

10 I myself will stay at Mizpah to represent you before the Babylonians who come to us, but you are to harvest the wine, summer fruit and oil, and put them in your storage jars, and live in the towns you have taken over."

11 When all the Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom and all the other countries heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor over them,

12 they all came back to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, from all the countries where they had been scattered. And they harvested an abundance of wine and summer fruit.

13 Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers still in the open country came to Gedaliah at Mizpah 14 and said to him, "Don't you know that Baalis king of the Ammonites has sent Ishmael son of Nethaniah to take your life?" But Gedaliah son of Ahikam did not believe them.

15 Then Johanan son of Kareah said privately to Gedaliah in Mizpah, "Let me go and kill Ishmael son of Nethaniah, and no one will know it. Why should he take your life and cause all the Jews who are gathered around you to be scattered and the remnant of Judah to perish?"

16 But Gedaliah son of Ahikam said to Johanan son of Kareah, "Don't do such a thing! What you are saying about Ishmael is not true."

The opening statement "The word came to Jeremiah from the Lord" seems puzzling because no word of prophecy is recorded after this. *The Pulpit Commentary* offers the following explanation: "The formula seems to announce a prophecy; but no prophecy follows. It is not allowable to suppose, with Keil and others, that 'the word' describes the entire body of prophetic utterance in ch. 40-45. (in spite of the fact that ch. 44. and 45. have special headings). The use would be unexampled; and a prologue of forty verses (see ... Jeremiah 42:7) is equally contrary to prophetic analogy. Apparently the 'word,' or prophecy, which originally followed the heading has been lost or removed to some other place." This is, however, not the opinion of several other Bible scholars. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, for instance, states: "Word that came - the heading of a new part of the book (Jer 41-44) - namely, the prophecies to the Jews in Judea and Egypt after the taking of the city, blended with history. The prophecy does not begin until Jer 42:7, and the previous history is introductory to it." *Barnes' Notes* points out: "As what follows is mainly a historical narrative, it seems that the title 'The word ...' was appropriate not merely to a prediction of the future, but to an account of the past, if written by a prophet. The Jews regarded history as inspired if written by a seer, and thus their historical books are called 'the early prophets.'"

Jeremiah's moving from Jerusalem to Ramah must have been an administrative mistake on the side of the Babylonians. We may suppose that it was embarrassing to them and that those who had made the error were severely punished. When Nebuzaradan arrived in Ramah and identified Jeremiah, he gave evidence of some amazing understanding of Jewish prophecy. *The Pulpit Commentary* seems to cast some doubt on the genuineness of the text, stating: "The coloring of the speech is that of a Jewish prophet (comp. Isaiah 36:10)." But *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: "Probably the captives were interrogated and screened there prior to their deportation. 2-4. This speech, couched in Jewish theological language, is not so unlikely in a Babylonian mouth as it might at first seem. It appears that the Assyrians studied the theology of the people whom they attacked for use in psychological warfare (2 Kings 18:22,33-35). And the Babylonians had surely heard of the strange, quisling prophet within the Jerusalem walls and his seeming pro-Babylonian speeches. Since he had served them so well (as they thought), the Babylonians purposed to let him go free. Jeremiah's proud Hebrew heart must have rebelled at the inference that he was on their side, but he accepted his freedom."

Jeremiah was given the option of going to Babylon, not as a captive but a free man, or stay in the country, wherever he desired. The words "However, before Jeremiah turned to go" (v.5) are the translation of the Hebrew "now while yet when he was not." The Hebrew text uses the word *owd*, which can mean anything like "again," "more," or "yet." Whether the commander had second thoughts, or whether he merely suggested to Jeremiah what to do is difficult to determine. Jeremiah decided to take Nebuzaradan's advice and put himself under the protection of Gedaliah, the new Jewish governor, appointed by the Babylonians. He also accepted the food and present given to him. That may have been embarrassing for him, but difficult to refuse under the circumstances.

Gedaliah's appointment as governor seems a wise move from the side of the Babylonians. We must not jump to the conclusion that they were motivated by pure humanitarian ideals. It was more the practical consideration that a man of peace would benefit the Babylonians more than a country and people left in desperate conditions. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about him: "The narratives reveal Gedaliah in a very attractive light, as one who possessed the confidence alike of his own people and their conquerors; a man of rare wisdom and tact, and of upright, transparent character, whose kindly nature and generous disposition would not allow him to think evil of a brother; a man altogether worthy of the esteem in which he was held by succeeding generations of his fellow-countrymen."

Gedaliah was obviously a man of wisdom who understood that guerilla warfare against the Babylonians would benefit no one. This understanding indicates that he believed the devastation of the country to be God's punishment for the people's idolatry. To keep on resisting the Babylonians would be tantamount to resisting the Lord. What Judah needed at this point was healing, not more war. This does not make Gedaliah a Quisling, but a realist who knew that resistance would be useless and detrimental to the welfare of the people who were left. His assurance to the Judean army officers, that they would be safe if they joined him, must have had some basis in assurances given to him by the Babylonians. But we are not told how and when these were given.

Barnes' Notes observes about the mention of harvest: "As Jerusalem was captured in the fifth month, August, it would now be autumn, and there would be fruit upon the trees, enough to maintain the scanty population during the winter." This sounds good, but, as *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains, there was a hidden catch. Quoting Herodotus, the commentary states about Gedaliah's speech to the returned people: "He artfully, in order to conciliate them, represents the burden of the service to the Chaldeans as falling on him, while they may freely gather their wine, fruits, and oil. He does not now add that these very fruits were to constitute the chief part of the tribute to be paid to Babylon; which, though fruitful in corn, was less productive of grapes, figs, and olives. The grant of 'vineyards' to the 'poor' (Jer 39:10) would give hope to the discontented of enjoying the best fruits (Jer 40:12)."

Not all the men who joined Gedaliah did so from pure motives. Ishmael son of Nethaniah was among those who had fled Jerusalem before the siege and had taken refuge in the land of Ammon. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about him: "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." Gedaliah received warning about a plot to assassinate him, plotted by Baalis king of the Ammonites and entrusted to be carried out by Ishmael. But, although all the army officers attested to the fact, Gedaliah did not believe them. About this gullibility, Harrison observes: "Gedaliah's sincerity was unquestionable, as was his avowed intention to bring stability and prosperity back to the land. The Ammonite king *Baalis* (14), otherwise unknown, may have had plans for occupying the territory, hence his desire to see Gedaliah removed from office ... When informed, Gedaliah was evidently unable to accept the fact that others were less sincere than himself in his desire for national stability. His tragedy lay in his inability to make a critical assessment of situations and people alike. His degree of commitment to the welfare of his charges precluded the required amount of emotional detachment from his task. This mistake, repeated before and since, cost him his life."

The Adam Clarke's Commentary observes about Gedaliah's refusal to order Ishmael's assassination: "He thought it quite possible that the man who was capable of becoming an assassin was capable of telling a lie; and therefore he would not credit what he said. Had he been a little more distrustful, he would have saved his own life. The next chapter shows that Johanan's information was too true. So noble Gedaliah lost his life by not believing that evil of others of which he himself was incapable." It sounds as if Clarke would have endorsed an assassination plan. It is obvious that Gedaliah was too gullible, but it was to his credit that he refused to give approval to cold-blooded murder. He could, however, have ordered Johanan's arrest, but, obviously, he saw no reason for that.

10. The execution of the plot and its sequel 41:1-18

1 In the seventh month Ishmael son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, who was of royal blood and had been one of the king's officers, came with ten men to Gedaliah son of Ahikam at Mizpah. While they were eating together there,

2 Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the ten men who were with him got up and struck down Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, with the sword, killing the one whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land.

3 *Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with Gedaliah at Mizpah, as well as the Babylonian soldiers who were there.*

4 *The day after Gedaliah's assassination, before anyone knew about it,*

5 *eighty men who had shaved off their beards, torn their clothes and cut themselves came from Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria, bringing grain offerings and incense with them to the house of the Lord. 6* **Ishmael son of Nethaniah went out from Mizpah to meet them, weeping as he went. When he met them, he said, "Come to Gedaliah son of Ahikam."**

7 *When they went into the city, Ishmael son of Nethaniah and the men who were with him slaughtered them and threw them into a cistern.*

8 *But ten of them said to Ishmael, "Don't kill us! We have wheat and barley, oil and honey, hidden in a field." So he let them alone and did not kill them with the others.*

9 *Now the cistern where he threw all the bodies of the men he had killed along with Gedaliah was the one King Asa had made as part of his defense against Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael son of Nethaniah filled it with the dead.*

10 *Ishmael made captives of all the rest of the people who were in Mizpah — the king's daughters along with all the others who were left there, over whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam. Ishmael son of Nethaniah took them captive and set out to cross over to the Ammonites.*

11 *When Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him heard about all the crimes Ishmael son of Nethaniah had committed,*

12 *they took all their men and went to fight Ishmael son of Nethaniah. They caught up with him near the great pool in Gibeon.*

13 *When all the people Ishmael had with him saw Johanan son of Kareah and the army officers who were with him, they were glad.*

14 *All the people Ishmael had taken captive at Mizpah turned and went over to Johanan son of Kareah.*

15 *But Ishmael son of Nethaniah and eight of his men escaped from Johanan and fled to the Ammonites.*

16 *Then Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him led away all the survivors from Mizpah whom he had recovered from Ishmael son of Nethaniah after he had assassinated Gedaliah son of Ahikam: the soldiers, women, children and court officials he had brought from Gibeon. 17* **And they went on, stopping at Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem on their way to Egypt**

18 *to escape the Babylonians. They were afraid of them because Ishmael son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed as governor over the land.*

This chapter describes the crime of Ishmael in gruesome detail. There is some confusion about the time that passed between Gedaliah's appointment as governor and his assassination. *Barnes' Notes* states about the seventh month: "Gedaliah's government lasted less than two months." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, however, writes: "The tragedy of this event was marked in later Judaism by a fast in the seventh month, *i.e.* October (*cf.* Zc. 7:5; 8:19). However, the actual year in which Gedaliah was killed is not stated. A harvest had just been gathered in (40:12), but whether this was in 587 BC or not is unknown. Perhaps at least one year had intervened between the fall of Jerusalem and Gedaliah's murder, if only to allow refugees to return and cultivate the land."

Gedaliah not only refused to believe that Ishmael intended to murder him, he even invited him and the men who were with him to a meal. During this meal Ishmael and those with him assassinated Gedaliah, all the other Jews who had joined him and the Babylonian soldiers at Mizpah. This dastardly act marked a turning point in the history of the Promised Land. Gedaliah's murder was an act of rebellion against God. Ishmael's treason had nothing to do with loving God or serving Him. It was a demonstration of Jewish nationalism of the worst kind. Ezekiel brings out the mentality of people like Ishmael, who lived a life of disobedience to God's law, indulged in idolatry and adultery and yet believed that they had a right to God's promises.¹

The Pulpit Commentary states: “The day of the murder of Gedaliah (the third day of the seventh month) was kept as a fast day by the post-Captivity Jews (see ... Zechariah 7:5; 8:19). It was the day on which the hope of living a separate life in the promised land, for a time at least, vanished; and the murder was avenged by a new captivity.”

Ishmael followed up this murder the next day with the killing of a group of eighty men who had come from places in the previous northern kingdom. These men mourned the destruction of the temple and endeavored to maintain the worship of God by bringing peace offerings to Mizpah. Some Bible scholars interpret the mention of “the house of the Lord” to be a provisional place of worship erected by Gedaliah; others believe that these pilgrims were on their way to Jerusalem to the place where the temple had been. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this that some Bible scholars have “conjectured that Gedaliah had erected a provisional temple at Mizpah, which was already hallowed by its association with the Prophet Samuel. This is confirmed by 1 Macc. 3:46, where it is said of the pious Jews in the Maccabean rising, that they ‘assembled themselves... and came to Maspha, over against Jerusalem; for in Maspha was the place where they prayed aforetime in Israel.’”

Ishmael and his gang spared the life of ten of the group of pilgrims who said that they had hidden provisions of food. All the dead bodies were thrown into a cistern that had been part of an old defense system of the city of Jerusalem from the time of King Asa.

Ishmael also took the remaining population of Mizpah as prisoners, among them the daughters of King Zedekiah, taking them with him to Moab, probably intending to sell them all into slavery there. But this plan was prevented by Johanan who attacked Ishmael’s gang and rescued the captives.

After these events, Johanan, and those with him, felt that the Babylonians would blame them for the murder of Gedaliah. They decided to flee to Egypt, believing that they would there be beyond the reach of Nebuchadnezzar.

11. Jeremiah is consulted about the flight to Egypt 42:1-22

1 Then all the army officers, including Johanan son of Kareah and Jezaniah son of Hoshai, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached

2 Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, "Please hear our petition and pray to the Lord your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left.

3 Pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do."

4 "I have heard you," replied Jeremiah the prophet. "I will certainly pray to the Lord your God as you have requested; I will tell you everything the Lord says and will keep nothing back from you."

5 Then they said to Jeremiah, "May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the Lord your God sends you to tell us.

6 Whether it is favorable or unfavorable, we will obey the Lord our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the Lord our God."

7 Ten days later the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.

8 So he called together Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers who were with him and all the people from the least to the greatest.

9 He said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition, says:

10 'If you stay in this land, I will build you up and not tear you down; I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you.

11 Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be afraid of him, declares the Lord, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands.

12 I will show you compassion so that he will have compassion on you and restore you to your land.'

1. See Ezek. 33:24-29

*13 "However, if you say, 'We will not stay in this land,' and so disobey the Lord your God,
14 and if you say, 'No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread,'
15 then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there,
16 then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die.
17 Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I will bring on them.'
18 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'As my anger and wrath have been poured out on those who lived in Jerusalem, so will my wrath be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will be an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach; you will never see this place again.'
19 "O remnant of Judah, the Lord has told you, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Be sure of this: I warn you today
20 that you made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the Lord your God and said, 'Pray to the Lord our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.'
21 I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the Lord your God in all he sent me to tell you.
22 So now, be sure of this: You will die by the sword, famine and plague in the place where you want to go to settle."*

This chapter is about sincerity. The people who approached Jeremiah appeared to be sincere in their quest for the will of God, but they were not. They wanted to know the will of the Lord in order to decide whether they liked it or not. Sincere surrender to God's will evinces itself in a decision to do God's will before it has been revealed.

The presence of Jeremiah is not explained. We read earlier that Jeremiah had gone to Mizpah to put himself under the protection of Gedaliah. But how he escaped Ishmael's massacre is unclear. It is obvious that he was among those who were in the process of being taken to Amon.

Jeremiah treated the request as a sincere desire to know God's will and he did seek the Lord on their behalf. Although we conclude from the end of the story that these men had already made up their mind about going to Egypt, they pledged under oath that they would obey God unconditionally, "whether it is favorable or unfavorable." Their oath falls into the same category of Zedekiah's oath sworn in the Name of the Lord to Nebuchadnezzar.¹

God's answer to Jeremiah did not come until ten days later. No explanation is given for this delay. We learn from Daniel's experience at a later time that there sometimes is demonic opposition. The angel who came to bring Daniel the answer to his prayer said: "Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia."² Maybe God merely wanted to test the people's patience by delaying His answer.

The answer defied human logic. It seemed reasonable to assume that the Babylonians would avenge the murder of Gedaliah whom they had appointed as governor. It also seemed that Egypt would be the safest place to go. There was in the written Word of God an injunction against going back to Egypt. Moses had told the people "You are not to go back that way again."³ The problem of the remnant in Judah was that they looked for protection by human power instead of God's protection. God promised them His

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1. See II Chron. 36:13.
 2. Dan. 10:12,13
 3. Deut. 17:16

protection, but they chose Pharaoh's instead. God's promise and warning is given in the strongest possible language. But this failed to have an impact upon those who already had made up their mind as to what to do.

God's warning is followed by Jeremiah's warning. God's answer constituted a revelation to Jeremiah. He had assumed that Johanan and those with him wanted to know God's will, as they said they did. It was impossible for Jeremiah, whose relationship with God was personal and intimate, to imagine that people would have the audacity to play games with God, as if God would be unaware of their prejudice and hypocrisy.

The New International Version renders v.20 – “You made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the Lord your God.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “For you dissembled in your hearts when you sent me to the LORD your God...” The Hebrew keyword is *ta`ah*, which means: “to vacillate,” or “stray.” We find it in the verse: “If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey *wandering off*, be sure to take it back to him.”

12. The move to Egypt 43:1-13

1 When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the Lord their God — everything the Lord had sent him to tell them —

2 Azariah son of Hoshaiiah and Johanan son of Kareah and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, "You are lying! The Lord our God has not sent you to say, 'You must not go to Egypt to settle there.'

3 But Baruch son of Neriah is inciting you against us to hand us over to the Babylonians, so they may kill us or carry us into exile to Babylon."

4 So Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers and all the people disobeyed the Lord's command to stay in the land of Judah.

5 Instead, Johanan son of Kareah and all the army officers led away all the remnant of Judah who had come back to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered.

6 They also led away all the men, women and children and the king's daughters whom Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard had left with Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, and Jeremiah the prophet and Baruch son of Neriah.

7 So they entered Egypt in disobedience to the Lord and went as far as Tahpanhes.

8 In Tahpanhes the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah:

9 "While the Jews are watching, take some large stones with you and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes.

10 Then say to them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I will send for my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and I will set his throne over these stones I have buried here; he will spread his royal canopy above them.

11 He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, and the sword to those destined for the sword.

12 He will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he will burn their temples and take their gods captive. As a shepherd wraps his garment around him, so will he wrap Egypt around himself and depart from there unscathed.

13 There in the temple of the sun in Egypt he will demolish the sacred pillars and will burn down the temples of the gods of Egypt.'"

In view of the fact that events had clearly vindicated Jeremiah because of his previous predictions about the return of Nebuchadnezzar and the fall of Jerusalem, the people who had asked him to consult the Lord, had no reason to suspect that the prophet would lie to them this time. Their rebellion against God had prejudiced them to the point where they were unable to think straight. In accusing Baruch as the author of Jeremiah's prophecy, they implied that Jeremiah was a false prophet. Jeremiah is flatly called a liar. Thus far Johanan had been the leader of the group. The text now places Azariah son of Hoshaiiah at the top and makes him the primary spokesman.

We can understand why the leaders of the group would have thought that staying at Mizpah would endanger their lives. The murder of Gedaliah would bring the wrath of the Babylonians upon them. Fleeing to Egypt seemed the logical thing to do. That Jeremiah's prophecy came to them as a surprise is quite understandable. That they had grounds for doubting Jeremiah's sincerity is not. It was pride that prevented them from accepting the Word of God. The text qualifies them as "arrogant men." The Hebrew word used is *zed*, which means "presumptuous" or "proud." We find the word first used in the verse: "Keep your servant also from willful sins."¹ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "It would seem as if the 'proud men' were distinguished from others. Jeremiah had called the whole people together (... Jeremiah 42:8); but a few domineering men assumed to represent the rest."

Bible scholars have tried to find reasons for the people's prejudice against Baruch. The fact is we know practically nothing about him and the distance of several millennia prevents us from research. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about him: "He was also according to Josephus a man of unusual acquirements (Ant, X, ix , 1). 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." If somehow he was blamed for the content of Jeremiah's prophecy on the basis of previous predictions, which he evidently voiced in public, he ought to have been given the same recognition of being true as was given to Jeremiah. But that is not how the mind of rebellious man works.

Johanah and all the military leaders with him took the whole party of people with them to Egypt, Jeremiah included. The text states that they arrived at Tahpanhes, the first city at the border crossing. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on this: "This city was called Daphne by the Greeks, and was situated at the extremity of Lower Egypt, near to Heliopolis. It was called Daphne Pelusiaca. They halted at this place, most probably for the purpose of obtaining the king's permission to penetrate further into Egypt. It was at this place that, according to Jerome, tradition says the faithful Jeremiah was stoned to death by these rebellious wretches; for whose welfare he had watched, prayed, gone through many indignities, and suffered every kind of hardship. And now he sealed the truth of his divine mission with his blood."

At Tahpanhes Jeremiah received another revelation from the Lord regarding the future fate of this remnant. If Jerome's account of Jeremiah's martyrdom at this place is correct, this prophecy may have been one of the last events in the prophet's life.

God instructed Jeremiah to perform an act that would go beyond an object lesson or parable. In a literal sense the prophet had to lay the foundation for Nebuchadnezzar's throne in Egypt. First of all we learn that Pharaoh had a palace in Tahpanhes. Jeremiah was instructed to take some large stones and cement them in the pavement in front of the palace. *The New International Version* uses the words "bury them in clay." The Hebrew word *melet* probably means "cement." Since this is the only place in Scripture where the word occurs, it is difficult to determine what actually happened. Another linguistic problem is in the phrase "he will spread his royal canopy above them." The Hebrew word *shaphruwr*, meaning "splendid," also occurs only here in Scripture. But the meaning of the text in general is quite clear. What the remnant sought to achieve in terms of safety would be their undoing. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes here: "The meaning of this parable, however, is clear. Though the Judean refugees have buried themselves in populous Egypt, they will be discovered and feel, as their compatriots had done, the weight of Babylonian might. A fragmentary inscription records that Nebuchadnezzar actually invaded Egypt in 568/7 BC, when Amasis (570–526) was Pharaoh. The attack was more of a punitive expedition than a wholesale reduction of the land. Amasis appeared to heed the warning, for thereafter he was careful to remain on good terms with Babylon." About the phrase "As a shepherd wraps his garment around him, so will he wrap Egypt around himself and depart from there unscathed," Harrison comments: "While unusual, the simile of the shepherd points to some such use as 'picking off,' as for example pieces of grass, insects, and the like. The conqueror will pick his prey clean, and this seems to be the best sense of the term."

1. Ps. 19:13

God calls Nebuchadnezzar here “My servant Nebuchadnezzar.” The reason for this title is that he will be the instrument of judgment of the gods of Egypt. As in the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. God had said to Moses on the occasion of the first Passover: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.”¹ What had made Johanan and the people with him to decide to flee to Egypt was their involvement with idols in Canaan. In fleeing to Egypt, they had withdrawn from God’s protection and placed themselves under the protection of the gods of Egypt, that is of Satan and his demonic powers. Nebuchadnezzar may not have been aware of the fact that he was involved in a spiritual warfare, but in God’s eyes he was.

**13. A prophecy of judgment containing the last recorded utterances of Jeremiah
44:1-30**

1 This word came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews living in Lower Egypt — in Migdol, Tahpanhes and Memphis — and in Upper Egypt:

2 "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You saw the great disaster I brought on Jerusalem and on all the towns of Judah. Today they lie deserted and in ruins

3 because of the evil they have done. They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods that neither they nor you nor your fathers ever knew.

4 Again and again I sent my servants the prophets, who said, ‘Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!’

5 But they did not listen or pay attention; they did not turn from their wickedness or stop burning incense to other gods.

6 Therefore, my fierce anger was poured out; it raged against the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem and made them the desolate ruins they are today.

7 "Now this is what the Lord God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Why bring such great disaster on yourselves by cutting off from Judah the men and women, the children and infants, and so leave yourselves without a remnant?

8 Why provoke me to anger with what your hands have made, burning incense to other gods in Egypt, where you have come to live? You will destroy yourselves and make yourselves an object of cursing and reproach among all the nations on earth.

9 Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and by the kings and queens of Judah and the wickedness committed by you and your wives in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem?

10 To this day they have not humbled themselves or shown reverence, nor have they followed my law and the decrees I set before you and your fathers.

11 "Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: I am determined to bring disaster on you and to destroy all Judah.

12 I will take away the remnant of Judah who were determined to go to Egypt to settle there. They will all perish in Egypt; they will fall by the sword or die from famine. From the least to the greatest, they will die by sword or famine. They will become an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach.

13 I will punish those who live in Egypt with the sword, famine and plague, as I punished Jerusalem.

14 None of the remnant of Judah who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or survive to return to the land of Judah, to which they long to return and live; none will return except a few fugitives."

15 Then all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, along with all the women who were present — a large assembly — and all the people living in Lower and Upper Egypt, said to Jeremiah,

16 "We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord!

1. Ex. 12:12

17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm.

18 But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine."

19 The women added, "When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?"

20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, both men and women, who were answering him,

21 "Did not the Lord remember and think about the incense burned in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem by you and your fathers, your kings and your officials and the people of the land?

22 When the Lord could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today.

23 Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the Lord and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see."

24 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, including the women, "Hear the word of the Lord, all you people of Judah in Egypt.

25 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: You and your wives have shown by your actions what you promised when you said, 'We will certainly carry out the vows we made to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the Queen of Heaven.' "Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows!

26 But hear the word of the Lord, all Jews living in Egypt: 'I swear by my great name,' says the Lord, 'that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, "As surely as the Sovereign Lord lives."

27 For I am watching over them for harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed.

28 Those who escape the sword and return to the land of Judah from Egypt will be very few. Then the whole remnant of Judah who came to live in Egypt will know whose word will stand — mine or theirs.

29 "'This will be the sign to you that I will punish you in this place,' declares the Lord, 'so that you will know that my threats of harm against you will surely stand.'

30 This is what the Lord says: 'I am going to hand Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt over to his enemies who seek his life, just as I handed Zedekiah king of Judah over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the enemy who was seeking his life.'"

The Jews had evidently spread out over several cities in Egypt and settled in most of the eastern part of the country, both north and south. This prophecy may have been spoken to them during a feast which had brought them together. Most Bible scholars agree that this is Jeremiah's last recorded prophecy.

The Hebrew text identifies God here in His full title as *Yahweh Tsabaa`owt, Eloheey Yisraa`eel*. The people are told to remember the lessons of recent history. They were called upon to remember what brought them where they were. Jerusalem and Judah lay in ruin as a result of the people's idolatry. The people had sinned against the first commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments."¹

1. Ex. 20:3-6

Having received proof of what idolatry pays, one would expect that these people had learned their lesson, but they had not. God warns them that they would become extinct if they would not make a clean break with idols. Future history shows that those who were taken into Babylonian captivity did learn the lesson, but the party that fled to Egypt kept clinging to their idols.

In their response to Jeremiah's prophecy the people demonstrated their total spiritual blindness. They refused to recognize that the disaster that fell upon Jerusalem and Judah was caused by God. They rather believed that their brief interruption of their idol worship was the cause of the catastrophe.

The idolatry focused on the worship of heavenly bodies. The one singled out here is called "the Queen of Heaven." *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states that the title "occurs only in two passages: Jer 7:18; 44:17-19,25, where the prophet denounces the wrath of God upon the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem who have given themselves up to the worship of the host of heaven. This is no doubt a part of the astral worship which is found largely developed among the Jews in the later period of their history in Canaan. It is first mentioned in 2 Kings 17:16 as practiced by the men of the Northern Kingdom when Samaria had fallen and the ten tribes were being carried away into captivity. Moses is represented as warning the Israelites against the worship of the sun and moon and stars and all the host of heaven, practiced by the people of Canaan (Deut 4:19; 17:3) and the existence of such worship among the Canaanites and neighboring nations is attested from an early period ... From the prophets we gather that before the exile the worship of the host of heaven had become established among all classes and in all the towns of Israel (... Ezek 8:16). In that worship the queen of heaven had a conspicuous place; and if, as seems probable from the cakes which were offered, she is to be identified with the Assyrian Ishtar and the Canaanite Astarte, the worship itself was of a grossly immoral and debasing character. That this Ishtar cult was of great antiquity and widely spread in ancient Babylonia may be seen from the symbols of it found in recent excavations ... That the people of Judah in the days before the exile had given themselves over to the worst and vilest forms of heathen worship and incurred the grievous displeasure of Yahweh is made clear by the denunciation of the worship of the queen of heaven by Jeremiah."

On the title Queen of Heaven, R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, states: "The rare word *m^elek^eth*, the *queen* of EVV, is supposedly a reference to the Assyrian deity Ishtar (Canaanite, 'Astarte'), the goddess of war and love whose numerous titles included the designation 'queen of heaven.' However, the precise object of worship is not easy to determine, since some Hebrew MSS read *m le^keth*, meaning 'creative work,' 'handiwork,' presumably indicating the stars and planets. LXX of 7:18 reads 'the heavenly host,' while the Targum rendered it 'the star(s) of heaven.' If Ishtar is intended, the identification may be made with the Venus star, which, however, was venerated in Canaan as a male deity. The astral nature of the cult seems better preserved in the Canaanite tradition in the worship of Astarte (Ashtoreth). Because Baal worship was eradicated during Josiah's reformation (2 Ki. 23:4–20), the rebellious remnant blamed all their misfortunes on this action and the instability of Judah following Josiah's death at Megiddo in 609 BC."

On the women's response to Jeremiah's prophecy, *Barnes' Notes* states: "They had the authority of their husbands for what they were doing. Jeremiah must leave them alone, and discuss the matter with those who alone had the right to interfere." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, adds to this: "According to ancient Jewish law (Nu. 30:7–15) the validity of a vow made by a married woman rested on the consent of her husband and if he did not approve he had the power to annul the vow. Thus the pagan worship which Jeremiah is condemning so vigorously had the full approval of the husbands in the community."

It is easy to misunderstand the full extent of these people's guilt. The Bible is less than explicit about what all was involved in this idol worship. It was not a mere ritual of baking and sacrificing cakes made in the image of a female deity. Nothing is said here about the sexual orgies and human sacrifices that accompanied these rites. But that was, evidently, the depth of darkness into which these people had thrown themselves. They had pledged themselves to demons and they felt that they owed it to their honor to keep their vows. That is why Jeremiah answers their remonstrance with "Go ahead then, do what you promised! Keep your vows!" Breaking their vows would have saved their lives; keeping them meant death.

V.26 contains one of the darkest announcements in all of Scripture. The Name of YHWH will not be mentioned anymore by any Jew living in Egypt, because there will no longer be any Jews in Egypt. This declaration is made by *YHWH Tsabaa`owt Eloheey Yisraa`eel*. God says to these people: “I swear by my great name ... that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, ‘As surely as the Sovereign Lord lives.’” This does not mean that God had become less awesome, but that those who had been called by that awesome Name had lost their identity. The image of God had died within them and consequently they were no longer considered to be human beings in the eyes of the Lord. In calling themselves God’s children and practicing idolatry, they had sinned against the third of the Ten Commandments which reads: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”¹

As a sign that this would happen to the remnant of Judah who had fled to Egypt, Jeremiah prophesied that Pharaoh Hophra would succumb to the Babylonians. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* comments on this: “Their doom will be heralded by the overthrow of pharaoh Hophra (30), the fourth king of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty, whose career (589–570 BC) was marked by interference in Palestinian affairs. He had gone to the help of beleaguered Jerusalem (37:5), but withdrew in the face of Babylonian pressure in 588 BC, after which Jerusalem fell. After his Libyan campaign of 569 BC a young relative, Ahmose, was proclaimed pharaoh in a revolt. Hophra tried to defeat Ahmose in a battle in 566 BC, but was slain, as Jeremiah had prophesied. Whether the latter lived to see this or not is unknown.”

The Pulpit Commentary adds to this: “All that we know of the fate of Hophra (Apries) is derived from Herodotus... who states that Amssis ‘gave Apries over into the hands of his former subjects, to deal with as they chose. Then the Egyptians took him and strangled him.’”

VIII. A MESSAGE TO BARUCH 45:1-5

1 *This is what Jeremiah the prophet told Baruch son of Neriah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, after Baruch had written on a scroll the words Jeremiah was then dictating:*

2 *"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch:*

3 *You said, ‘Woe to me! The Lord has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.’”*

4 *[The Lord said,] "Say this to him: ‘This is what the Lord says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the land.*

5 *Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. For I will bring disaster on all people, declares the Lord, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life.’”*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments: “This brief chapter recapitulates an event occurring in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (605/4 BC). Chronologically this passage is out of order, and should follow 36:8. Baruch is reproofed for being depressed about his future, and is given a promise of personal survival to sustain his hopes. The words written by Baruch ben Neriah (*cf.* 36:4) formed the contents of the scroll described in 36:2–4. Verse 3 is the only place where Baruch reveals anything about his own reactions to the current situation in Judah. His distress has arisen from realizing the implications, personal and national alike, of the utterances which he has been recording. Jeremiah has to remind Baruch of God’s own sorrow at destroying that which He had labored so hard to preserve. Yet such a calamity was inevitable because of the willful disobedience and apostasy of those chosen to exemplify a much higher calling. So appalling will be the tragedy that Baruch will count himself fortunate to have emerged alive (*cf.* 21:9; 38:2; 39:18).”

Even if the date of this chapter is not during the reign of Jehoiakim, it cannot be in the period in which the Jews of the previous chapter were in Egypt. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*

1. Ex. 20:7

states: “The date of the events here told is eighteen years before the taking of the city: this chapter in point of time follows Jer 36. However, it may have been subsequent to the suspicion thrown on Baruch by Azariah and Johanan (Jer 43:3), which caused his despondency; and so its position here may be its right place. Baruch seems to have been regularly employed by Jeremiah to commit his prophecies to writing (Jer 36:1,4,32).” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* calls this lack of chronological sequence “another instance of shameless transposition.” *Barnes’ Notes*, however, states about this: “As regards the place of this prophecy it would come in order of time next to Jer 36, but as that was a public, and this a private prophecy, they would not be written upon the same scroll. When the last memorials of Jeremiah’s life were added to the history of the fall of Jerusalem, Baruch attached to them this prediction, which-humbled by years, and the weight of public and private calamity-he now read with very different feelings from those which filled his mind in his youth.”

The chapter tells us just about as much about God as about Baruch. The fact that Baruch was deeply affected by Jeremiah’s prophecies of doom is not only quite understandable but even commendable. Jeremiah grieved about the fall of Jerusalem and the death of Judah as is obvious in *The Book of Lamentations*. That Baruch had his own lamentations is not more than natural. Jesus wept over Jerusalem even before disaster hit the nation. We read in Luke’s Gospel: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace — but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you.’”¹ Baruch’s tears, however, were not only, maybe not even primarily, for others. The words “Should you then seek great things for yourself?” indicate that Baruch had his own ambitions which he saw dashed to the ground.

We are not told what Baruch’s dreams were for himself and his future. He appears to have been a member of a high-class family, his brother Seraiah being King Zedekiah’s chamberlain.² *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states about him: “[Baruch] 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. He was carried with Jeremiah to Egypt ... and thereafter our knowledge of him is merely legendary. According to a tradition preserved by Jerome (on Isa 30:6 f) he died in Egypt soon after reaching that country. Two other traditions say that he went, or by Nebuchadnezzar was carried, to Babylon after this king conquered Egypt. The high character of Baruch and the important part he played in the life and work of Jeremiah induced later generations still further to enhance his reputation, and a large number of spurious writings passed under his name.”

Even more important than what this chapter tells us about Baruch is what it reveals to us about God. God invites Baruch to compare his grief to His. God’s sorrow over Judah was greater than Baruch’s. God’s sorrow over Baruch was even greater than Baruch himself knew. God’s tears are always bigger than ours. This message is meant to be for Baruch’s consolation and it probably was. It reminds us of the revelation of God’s heartache in the days previous to the flood of Noah. We read: “The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth — men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air — for I am grieved that I have made them.’”³ It also reminds us of the statement in *Hebrews*: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to

1. Luke 19:41-44
2. Jer. 51:59
3. Gen. 6:5-7

sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin.”¹

The Hebrew text of v.4 reads literally: “Behold, that which I have built I will break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up even this whole land.” The Hebrew words for “break down” and “pluck up” are *harac* and *nathash*. Both have the meaning of “destroy.” We find *harac* in the verse: “Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must *demolish* them and break their sacred stones to pieces.”² And *nathash* in “In furious anger and in great wrath the Lord *uprooted* them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now.”³

The divine plan for Israel involved much more than providing a place to live for one particular ethnic group. In calling Israel to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation,”⁴ God intended to make her a channel of revelation of Himself on earth. And the Promised Land was an image of God’s rest into which He intended to lead her. All this came to naught because of Israel’s disobedience and idolatry. She not only disobeyed but she betrayed her mission by siding with the enemy. That accounts for God’s furious anger and His great sorrow.

God wanted Baruch to compare his problem with God’s. For Baruch it was the death of his personal ambitions, for God it was the matter of the salvation of the world. But God promises Baruch the salvation of his own soul. In Hebrew the text reads: “But unto you I will give your life for a prey.” The Hebrew word for “life” here is *nephesh*, which is the word used in the verse “The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a *living being*.”⁵ “Prey” is *shalal*, which is the word used by Achan, who coveted the treasures of Jericho, saying: “When I saw in the *plunder* a beautiful robe from Babylonia, two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold weighing fifty shekels, I coveted them and took them.”⁶ God wanted Baruch to realize that life is the greatest gift He has given to all human beings. Many people, who survive disaster, testify that they are sorry about what they lost, but they are happy to be alive. And rightfully so!

B. ORACLES AGAINST FOREIGN NATIONS 46:1–51:64

AGAINST EGYPT (46:1–28)

1 This is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations:

2 Concerning Egypt:

This is the message against the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was defeated at Carchemish on the Euphrates River by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah:

3 "Prepare your shields, both large and small, and march out for battle!

4 Harness the horses, mount the steeds! Take your positions with helmets on! Polish your spears, put on your armor!

5 What do I see? They are terrified, they are retreating, their warriors are defeated. They flee in haste without looking back, and there is terror on every side," declares the Lord.

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1. Heb. 4:15
 2. Ex. 23:24
 3. Deut. 29:28
 4. Ex. 19:6
 5. Gen. 2:7
 6. Josh. 7:21

- 6 *"The swift cannot flee nor the strong escape. In the north by the River Euphrates they stumble and fall.*
- 7 *"Who is this that rises like the Nile, like rivers of surging waters?"*
- 8 *Egypt rises like the Nile, like rivers of surging waters. She says, 'I will rise and cover the earth; I will destroy cities and their people.'*
- 9 *Charge, O horses! Drive furiously, O charioteers! March on, O warriors — men of Cush and Put who carry shields, men of Lydia who draw the bow.*
- 10 *But that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty — a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied, till it has quenched its thirst with blood. For the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will offer sacrifice in the land of the north by the River Euphrates.*
- 11 *"Go up to Gilead and get balm, O Virgin Daughter of Egypt. But you multiply remedies in vain; there is no healing for you.*
- 12 *The nations will hear of your shame; your cries will fill the earth. One warrior will stumble over another; both will fall down together."*
- 13 *This is the message the Lord spoke to Jeremiah the prophet about the coming of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to attack Egypt:*
- 14 *"Announce this in Egypt, and proclaim it in Migdol; proclaim it also in Memphis and Tahpanhes: 'Take your positions and get ready, for the sword devours those around you.'*
- 15 *Why will your warriors be laid low? They cannot stand, for the Lord will push them down.*
- 16 *They will stumble repeatedly; they will fall over each other. They will say, 'Get up, let us go back to our own people and our native lands, away from the sword of the oppressor.'*
- 17 *There they will exclaim, 'Pharaoh king of Egypt is only a loud noise; he has missed his opportunity.'*
- 18 *"As surely as I live," declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty, "one will come who is like Tabor among the mountains, like Carmel by the sea.*
- 19 *Pack your belongings for exile, you who live in Egypt, for Memphis will be laid waste and lie in ruins without inhabitant.*
- 20 *"Egypt is a beautiful heifer, but a gadfly is coming against her from the north.*
- 21 *The mercenaries in her ranks are like fattened calves. They too will turn and flee together, they will not stand their ground, for the day of disaster is coming upon them, the time for them to be punished.*
- 22 *Egypt will hiss like a fleeing serpent as the enemy advances in force; they will come against her with axes, like men who cut down trees.*
- 23 *They will chop down her forest," declares the Lord, "dense though it be. They are more numerous than locusts, they cannot be counted.*
- 24 *The Daughter of Egypt will be put to shame, handed over to the people of the north."*
- 25 *The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I am about to bring punishment on Amon god of Thebes, on Pharaoh, on Egypt and her gods and her kings, and on those who rely on Pharaoh.*
- 26 *I will hand them over to those who seek their lives, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and his officers. Later, however, Egypt will be inhabited as in times past," declares the Lord.*
- 27 *"Do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel. I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile. Jacob will again have peace and security, and no one will make him afraid.*
- 28 *Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, for I am with you," declares the Lord. "Though I completely destroy all the nations among which I scatter you, I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you but only with justice; I will not let you go entirely unpunished."*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section with prophecies against foreign nations with the following: "The conviction that God exercised supreme control over individuals and nations alike is characteristic of the Hebrew prophetic spirit. At all periods of their activities the prophets felt that they were participating in events which would have more than purely local or national significance. A lively interest in the behavior of foreign peoples was one consequence of this attitude, and at times it

expressed itself in the condemnation of neighboring nations. In this section of his writings Jeremiah stands in the tradition of other Hebrew prophets who proclaimed divine judgment upon pagan peoples (*cf.* Is. 13 – 23; Ezk. 25 – 32; Am. 1:3 – 2:3).”

There are two sections of prophecy against foreign nations in Jeremiah, the first in Jer. 46:1-49:33 and the second in 50 and 51. *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “Between them is placed a prophecy against Elam (Jer 49:34-39) spoken in the first year of Zedekiah. The seven earlier prophecies belonging to the fourth year of Jehoiakim were written at the same time, and arranged as they at present stand. It is no doubt intentional that these prophecies against the nations are in number 7.”

The Pulpit Commentary observes about this section: “The point of time assumed is immediately before the battle of Carchemish. The Egyptian army has taken up its position by the Euphrates, and Jeremiah, from his prophetic watch tower, recognizes the importance of the step. He knows that a collision of the two great powers is inevitable, and that the fortunes of his world will be decided by the result. It is, in short, a ‘day of Jehovah’ which he sees before him. As a prophet, he cannot doubt what the issue will be. He falls into a lyrically descriptive mood, and portrays the picture which unrolls itself before his imagination.”

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary explains about Pharaoh Necho: “This was the person who defeated the army of Josiah, in which engagement Josiah received a mortal wound, of which he died, greatly regretted, soon after at Megiddo. After this victory, he defeated the Babylonians, and took Carchemish; and, having fortified it, returned to his own country. Nabopolassar sent his son Nebuchadnezzar with an army against him, defeated him with immense slaughter near the river Euphrates, retook Carchemish, and subdued all the revolted provinces, according to the following prophecies.” The scene Jeremiah describes here is the one in which Nebuchadnezzar retook Carchemish.

In the great battle for the balance of power among the great nations of that time Carchemish played a pivotal role. Babylon’s capture of the city spelled the end of the Assyrian empire as a world power. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* explains: “The battle of Carchemish (605 B.C.) was one of the decisive battles of history. The Egyptians sought here to curb the rising power of Babylon and bolster the almost destroyed Assyrian empire. The Egyptians were defeated, and Nebuchadnezzar’s pursuit of Necho toward Egypt was brought to an end only by the news of the death of his father Nabopolassar. He hurried back to Babylon to become the new king. From this time the Assyrian empire ceased to exist, and Babylon dominated not only Mesopotamia but all of the Levant.” The Scriptures testify to the fact that the battle of Carchemish shifted the balance of power decisively to Babylon. We read that after this battle: “The king of Egypt did not march out from his own country again, because the king of Babylon had taken all his territory, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Euphrates River.”¹

In vv. 3 and 4 Jeremiah describes in a tone of faked admiration the preparation of the Egyptian army for the battle. The infantry and cavalry are putting on their armor and marching out, anticipating victory. *The New International’s* rendering “What do I see?” is the translation of the Hebrew “Wherefore have I seen them.” The Hebrew word *madduwa`* can be translated “what” or “why?” Egypt’s well armed modern army takes to flight before the overwhelming forces of Babylon. Vv.3 and 4 described the preparation of the army for the battle by putting on her armor. Vv.5 and 6 depict the army’s defeat by the Babylonians. The Nile people are being slaughtered at the Euphrates River. In beautifully poetic language the battle is depicted as a battle between two rivers, the Nile against the Euphrates. The Euphrates wins. For the Egyptians the Nile was more than a body of water flowing through their country. She was the goddess who kept the land alive. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile. She was considered the supernatural source of the country’s economic and political power. As the river flooded the land so Egypt would flood the world. The Egyptian army conscripted other African tribes as mercenaries to fight their battles. V.9 mentions the men of Cush and Put who carry shields, and the men of Lydia who draw the bow.

But the actual battle is not between Egypt and Babylon, or between the Nile and the Euphrates, it is between the goddess of the Nile and the Lord God of hosts, *Adonaay, Yahweh Tsabaa`owt*. The battle is not

1. II Kings 24:7

with flesh and blood but with the evil powers of darkness. Egypt is defeated and deadly wounded. She needs more than medical help in order to be saved. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentation*, states about Egypt's medical abilities: "*Gilead* (cf. Je.8:22) was the proverbial home of balm. Egyptian medical skills were in developed form from the end of the third millennium BC, and the autographs on the great medical papyri can be assigned approximately to this period. The reference to many medicines (11) is a sarcastic comment on Egypt's inability to heal the wounds of defeat, her final humiliation being that others have now heard this news."

We could also look at v.11 as an invitation to Egypt to receive the help she actually needs by obtaining the balm of Gilead, which God had prescribed earlier for Israel's wounds. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?"¹ God did not want Egypt to be lost, but to be saved. Egypt would be lost, however, because she would only apply her own medication.

Most Bible scholars agree that the prophecy in vv.13-28 is separate from the one in the previous verses of this chapter and that it was given at a later date, after the battle of Carchemish. The message can be divided in three sections, vv. 13-19, 20-26 and 27,28. The last two verses are addressed to all of Israel as she has been dispersed among the nations. We could consider the whole of this prophecy to be meant for the remnant of God's people, primarily those who were with Jeremiah in Egypt, since the prophet was told to proclaim this message in the three Egyptian cities of Migdol, Memphis and Tahpanhes.

Again the Egyptians are called to arms, this time not to fight at Carchemish but to defend their homeland. The Babylonian army that defeated them there will do the same at home in Egypt. We may assume that the words "'Get up, let us go back to our own people and our native lands, away from the sword of the oppressor.' There they will exclaim, 'Pharaoh king of Egypt is only a loud noise; he has missed his opportunity'" are uttered by the mercenaries in the army, those recruited from other African countries. The derogatory expression "a loud noise" is the translation of the Hebrew word *sha'own*, which can also be translated "pomp," or "tumult." *The New English Bible* renders it "King Bombast." R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, suggests the reading "Loudmouth."

From the other side of the spectrum, in Babylon, where Ezekiel was among the captives who had been taken there earlier, we receive confirmation of the events Jeremiah predicted in Egypt. Ezekiel prophesied: "In the twenty-seventh year, in the first month on the first day, the word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon drove his army in a hard campaign against Tyre; every head was rubbed bare and every shoulder made raw. Yet he and his army got no reward from the campaign he led against Tyre. Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am going to give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will carry off its wealth. He will loot and plunder the land as pay for his army. I have given him Egypt as a reward for his efforts because he and his army did it for me, declares the Sovereign Lord. On that day I will make a horn grow for the house of Israel, and I will open your mouth among them. Then they will know that I am the Lord.'"²

The Hebrew text of v.15 – "Why will your warriors be laid low?" uses the word *'abbiyr*, which can also mean "angel," or "bull." In that sense we find it in the Messianic Psalm that reads: "Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me."³ *The Pulpit Commentary* observes here: "The literal rendering of the received text is, *Why is thy strong ones* (plural) *swept away* (or, *cast down*)? *He stood not, because Jehovah thrust him!* It is true that the first half of the verse might, consistently with grammar, be rendered, 'Why are thy strong ones swept away?' But the following singulars prove that the subject of the verb in the first verse half must itself be a singular. We must, therefore, follow the reading of the Septuagint, Vulgate, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and many of the extant Hebrew manuscripts, and change the

1. Jer. 8:22
2. Ezek. 29:17-21
3. Ps. 22:12

plural ‘strong ones’ into the singular ‘strong one.’ The word so rendered is elsewhere in Jeremiah one used (in the plural) of strong horses (... Jeremiah 8:16; 47:3; 1:11); but there is no necessity to bind ourselves to this acceptance. Other possible meanings are (1) strong man, *e.g.* ... Judges 5:22 and ... Lamentations 1:15; (2) steer, bull, *e.g.* ... Psalm 22:13 and 1:13, and (metaphorically of princes) 68:31. It is a tenable view that ‘thy strong one’ is to be understood distributively as equivalent to ‘every strong one of thine.’ But it is certainly more plausible to regard the phrase as a synonym for Apis, the sacred bull in which the supreme god Osiris was believed by the Egyptians to be incarnate. This was a superstition (strange, no doubt, but not so ignoble as some have thought) as deeply ingrained in the Egyptian mind as any in their complicated religion. ‘In fact, they believed that the supreme God was with them when they possessed a bull bearing certain hieratic marks, the signs of the incarnation of the divinity’ ... His death was the signal for a mourning as general as for a Pharaoh, and the funeral ceremonies (accounts of which are given in the inscriptions) were equally splendid. M. Mariette has discovered, in the neighborhood of Memphis, a necropolis in which the Apis bulls were successively interred from the eighteenth dynasty to the close of the period of the Ptolemies. For the Apis to be ‘swept away’ like ordinary plunder, or ‘cast down’ in the slaughtering trough (comp. ... Isaiah 34:7), was indeed a token that the glory of Egypt had departed. It is a singular coincidence that the very word here employed by Jeremiah for ‘bull’ (*abbir*) was adopted (like many other words) into the Egyptian language — it received the slightly modified form *aber*. The Septuagint, it should be added, is in favor of the general view of the verse thus obtained, and the authority of the *Egyptian-Jewish* version in a prophecy relative to Egypt is not slight. Its rendering of the first half is, ‘Why hath Apis, thy chosen calf, fled?’ But the probability is that it read the Hebrew differently, ‘Why hath Khaph (= Apis), thy chosen one, fled?’ This merely involves grouping some letters otherwise, and reading one word a little differently.”

This explanation about the bull Apis surely fits in the lesson that the war between Babylonia and Egypt was not a mere imperialistic event; it was an expression of God’s struggle with the satanic forces that stood behind the practices of idolatry.

The representation of Egypt in v.20 as “a beautiful heifer” seems to suit the “Apis” theory mentioned above. If Apis is the divine protector of the nation then the nation itself could be seen as its female counterpart. The strength of the bull, however, is no protection for the sting of a gadfly. Actually, the Hebrew text does not mention the pesky insect. The Hebrew merely reads: “Destruction comes out of the north, it comes.” The gadfly is the result of the change of one letter in the most important Hebrew received text. *The Pulpit Commentary* compares this image to the one Isaiah used in connection with an earlier Assyrian threat to Egypt: “In that day the Lord will whistle for flies from the distant streams of Egypt and for bees from the land of Assyria.”¹

Vv.20-24 describe the destruction of Egypt by the Babylonian army in a kaleidoscopic fashion with frequent changes of images and colors. As the bride of Apis, the heifer Egypt is stung by the Babylonian gadfly. The image used will have found response in the Egyptian mind if they remembered that in ancient history the fourth plague that led to the departure of Israel from Egyptian slavery was the plague of flies.² This gives to this prophecy, not only the thought that history repeats itself, but also that it is the same God who destroyed Egypt in earlier centuries, who is at work here.

The mercenaries in v.21 are not part of the Egyptian population. Some Bible scholars believe that they are not the same as the ones that fought in the battle of Carchemish and called Pharaoh “King Bombast.”³ These hired soldiers had probably not fought at all. They are compared to fattened calves, probably being the reserve troops kept at hand for times of emergency. Here they flee their comfortable positions. The Babylonian army moves in like woodcutters attacking a forest, felling whole clusters of trees

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1. Isa.7:18
 2. Ex. 8:20-32
 3. Jer.46:16,17

at the same time. The disturbed snakes of the forest slither away before the noise of the axes. There may have been deforestation, but the image is probably of the conquest of cities and the killing of population.

Vv.25 and 26 reveal God's compassion for the people of Egypt, but not for the demonic powers that rule the nation. Again, God introduces Himself with the title of His supreme authority: YHWH Tsabaa'owt, the God of Israel.

Barnes' Notes comments on Amon god of Thebes: "Ammon or Jupiter-Ammon was the first of the supreme triad of Thebes. He was the deity invisible and unfathomable, whose name signifies 'the concealed.' No-Amon, is the sacred city of Thebes, the capital of Upper Egypt. First then Yahweh's anger falls upon the representatives of the highest divine and human powers, Amon of No and Pharaoh. It next punishes Egypt generally, and her gods and her kings, for each city had its special divinity, and inferior rulers were placed in the several parts of the country. Finally, Pharaoh is again mentioned, with 'all who trust in him,' i.e., the Jews, who had made Egypt their confidence and not God." *The Pulpit Commentary* states about Amon god of Thebes that the name stands for the sun god Ra. "'Amon' signifies 'hidden,' for it is the mysterious, invisible deity who manifests himself in bodily form in the sun. From this name comes the classic designation, Jupiter-Ammon. ... The 'kings' are probably the high officials of the state, not a few of whom were either by birth or marriage members of the royal family. With a suggestive allusion to the many in Judah who 'trusted' in that 'broken reed' (...Isaiah 36:6)."

Ezekiel corroborates Jeremiah's prophecy in which restoration is promised to Egypt in future times. We read: "Yet this is what the Sovereign Lord says: At the end of forty years I will gather the Egyptians from the nations where they were scattered. I will bring them back from captivity and return them to Upper Egypt, the land of their ancestry. There they will be a lowly kingdom. It will be the lowliest of kingdoms and will never again exalt itself above the other nations. I will make it so weak that it will never again rule over the nations. Egypt will no longer be a source of confidence for the people of Israel but will be a reminder of their sin in turning to her for help. Then they will know that I am the Sovereign Lord."

Having shown His compassion for Egypt, the Lord turns to Israel with the same expression of divine love. Vv.27 and 28 are basically a repeat of an earlier promise of restoration and comfort with only slight variations.¹ Some Bible scholars believe that the interpolation of a text previously stated is the work of a later editor. But this cannot be proven or disproved.

It should not be difficult to imagine the morale of the Jews who had been evicted from their homeland and taken into captivity. Both the people in Babylon, who had been taken against their will and those who found themselves in Egypt by consent, against the will of God, must have experienced a change in attitude toward God. The Hebrew word *chesed*, lovingkindness no longer described their relationship with their Creator. Most of them must have come to the conclusion that YHWH 'Elohiym was their God of wrath, who would exterminate them branch, trunk and root.

Barnes' Notes observes: "These two verses are a repetition of Jer 30:10-11, with those slight variations which Jeremiah always makes when quoting himself. Egypt's fall and restoration have been foretold; but the prophet closes with a word of exhortation to the many erring Jews who dwelt there. Why should they flee from their country, and trust in a pagan power, instead of endeavoring to live in a manner worthy of the noble destiny which was their true glory and ground of confidence?" *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "Did Jeremiah write these verses here? There is strong reason to doubt it; for they occur, with insignificant variations, in ... Jeremiah 30:10, 11, where they cohere far better with the context than here." These verses may come to us as a surprise, but there is no reason to believe that they are not from the pen of Jeremiah, or that they are out of place at this point. Having pronounced His severe judgment upon Egypt and having added a note of compassion, it seems logical that God's thoughts, to put it in human terms, would go toward Israel and that His emotions would concentrate upon His chosen people. The sentiment here is the same as God revealed toward Ephraim, as expressed in Hosea's prophecy: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like

1. See Jer. 30:10,11.

Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man — the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.”¹

II. AGAINST PHILISTEA47:1-7

1 This is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza:

2 This is what the Lord says: "See how the waters are rising in the north; they will become an overflowing torrent. They will overflow the land and everything in it, the towns and those who live in them. The people will cry out; all who dwell in the land will wail

3 at the sound of the hoofs of galloping steeds, at the noise of enemy chariots and the rumble of their wheels. Fathers will not turn to help their children; their hands will hang limp.

4 For the day has come to destroy all the Philistines and to cut off all survivors who could help Tyre and Sidon. The Lord is about to destroy the Philistines, the remnant from the coasts of Caphtor.

5 Gaza will shave her head in mourning; Ashkelon will be silenced. O remnant on the plain, how long will you cut yourselves?

6 "‘Ah, sword of the Lord,’ [you cry,] ‘how long till you rest? Return to your scabbard; cease and be still.’

7 But how can it rest when the Lord has commanded it, when he has ordered it to attack Ashkelon and the coast?"

This short chapter in which God’s punishment of the Philistines is foretold has given much material for controversy to Bible scholars. The first problem is the apparent fixation of time as “before Pharaoh attacked Gaza.” Most believe that, instead of this statement clarifying anything, it confuses the issue. Some doubt that these words were from the hand of Jeremiah, that they were an addition by a later well-meaning editor.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about this short chapter: “This poetic utterance describes the destruction of Philistine cities by a foe from the north. The chronological note *before pharaoh attacked Gaza* is obscure, and is omitted by LXX. The attack may have occurred when Necho was marching to Harran in 609 BC. The image is that of a flood which will engulf the Philistine plain. Cf. 46:8, where the Egyptian armies are similarly depicted. Here the reference is to the Babylonians. So great will be the panic that fathers will abandon children to their fate. The obscure clause to cut off from Tyre and Sidon (4) seems to mean that any available Phoenician help would be prevented from reaching Philistia. *Caphtor* is the Old Testament designation of Crete, the land from which the Philistines came originally (cf. Am. 9:7). *Baldness* (5) was either a symbol of mourning (cf. Je. 16:6; 41:5) or a description of the complete razing of Gaza. The site of Ashkelon, about ten miles north of Gaza, has been occupied from Neolithic times. In the Amarna Age it was ruled by an Egyptian king (cf. Dt. 2:23), and was mentioned in the Execration Texts. In the Assyrian Annals it was known as *As-qa-en-na*, and became vassal city of Tiglathpileser III in 734 BC. It was sacked for resisting Nebuchadnezzar in December 604 BC, and its people were deported to Babylonia ... While Jeremiah pleads for the divinely-wielded sword to cease its ravages, he is aware that it constitutes God’s judgment upon a pagan nation.”

The Pulpit Commentary, by way of introduction to this chapter, states: “It is clear from the contents of the prophecy (and the inference is thoroughly confirmed by its position) that it was written after the battle of Carchemish, with reference to the dreaded northern foe — Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. The prophecy against Egypt precedes, because Egypt was by far the most important of the nations threatened by the advance of Nebuchadnezzar. But chronologically and geographically, it ought rather to have been placed

1. Hos. 11:8,9

at the end of the series, for Palestine had to be conquered before a design upon Egypt could have a reasonable chance of success. The commentators have given themselves much unnecessary trouble with the heading in ver. 1, which assigns the date of the prophecy to a period prior (as it would seem) to the battle of Carchemish. They forget that the headings are not to be received without criticism as historical evidence for the date of the prophecies. Knowing, as we do, that the prophecies were edited, not only by the disciples of the prophets, but by students of the Scriptures long after their time, it is gratuitously embarrassing one's self to give as much historical weight to the statement of a heading as to a clear inference from the contents of a prophecy. No doubt Providence watched over the movements of the editors; they must even be credited with a degree of inspiration, so far as moral and religious truths are concerned; but they were not exempt from being dependent on the ordinary sources of information in matters of history. It would seem, then, that, out of the various sieges of Gaza in the last century of the Jewish state, one in particular had fixed itself in the memory of the Jews; and it was not a siege by the Babylonians, but by the Egyptians. Seeing a reference to Gaza in ver. 5, a late editor of Jeremiah appended to the heading already in existence the words, 'before that Pharaoh smote Gaza.' He was wrong in so doing, but he only carried out, like many favorite modern preachers, what has been called the atomistic method of exegesis, by which a single verse is isolated from its context, and interpreted with total disregard of the rest of the passage. But which Pharaoh did this editor mean? And when did he lay siege to Gaza? The general view is that he means Pharaoh-Necho, who, according to Herodotus ... first defeated 'the Syrians at Magdolus,' and then 'made himself master of Cadytis, a large city of Syria.' It is assumed that Magdolus is a mistake for Megiddo, and that Cadytis means Gaza; and the former supposition is probable enough (a similar confusion has been made by certain manuscripts at ... Matthew 15:39; comp. the Authorized and Revised Versions); but the latter is rather doubtful. It is true that in 3:5 Herodotus speaks of 'the country from Phoenicia to the borders of the city Cadyfis' as belonging to 'the Palestine Syrians;' but is it not more probable that Herodotus mistook the position of *Jerusalem* (*Cadushta*, 'the holy (city),' in Aramaic) than that he called Gaza 'a city almost as large as Sardis?' Gaza was never called 'the holy city;' Jerusalem was."

The Philistines played an important role in Israel's history even before the patriarchs moved to Egypt and before Joshua conquered Canaan. The name Palestine is derived from the presence of the Philistines. The first contact with the Philistines was in the time of Abraham. In an effort to save his own life, Abraham had spread the story that Sarah was his sister, "forgetting" to mention that she was his wife also. So, Abimelech, the Philistine king, intended to add Sarah to his own harem. He was prevented from doing so by divine intervention. Probably believing that Abraham had a hotline to heaven and that his "loan of Sarah" to Abimelech was part of a plot to destroy him, the king treated Abraham with the greatest respect.¹ Several years later Isaac followed his father's bad example and told the same lie about his wife Rebekah, while sojourning in Philistine country because of a famine in Canaan. Isaac got away with the deception, but the relationship with the Philistines remained tense after that.²

When Israel conquered Canaan, they never succeeded in driving out the Philistines from their coastal regions.³ We read of sporadic encounters with Philistines as in the story of the judge Shamgar "who struck down six hundred Philistines with an ox goad."⁴ Hostile exchanges may have occurred and remained unreported during the time of the judges. Most of Samson's story is a confrontation with the Philistines.⁵ Hostilities became more frequent in the days of Samuel, beginning with the battle in which the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and returned it because of the damage it did to their own pagan religion.⁶

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1. Gen. 20:1-17
 2. Gen 26:1-32
 3. Judg. 3:1-4
 4. Judg. 3:31
 5. Judg. 13-16

The return of the Ark did not diminish Philistine oppression for Israel, for at the end of a twenty-year period Samuel said to the people: “If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”¹ It was probably the Philistine threat, more than any other oppression that made the Israelites ask for a king. God said to Samuel in connection with this: “About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.”²

The most famous confrontation between Israel and the Philistines is in the story of David and Goliath, whom David killed with a stone from his slingshot.³ King Saul fought his last battle with the Philistines and committed suicide after the enemy wounded him.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states: “History continued to the time of Ahaz: After they had killed Saul, we hear no more of them till the 8th year of David, when, after taking Jerusalem, he apparently went down to Adullam (2 Sam 5:17) and fell upon them in their rear as they advanced on his capital. He then destroyed their supremacy (8:1) as far as Gezer (1 Chron 20:4), and the whole of Philistia was subject to Solomon (1 Kings 4:21), though not long after his death they seem to have held the town of Gibbethon (15:27; 16:15) in the hills of Dan. Hezekiah smote the Philistines as far as Gaza (2 Kings 18:8) before 702 B.C., in which year (according to the Taylor cylinder) Sennacherib made Hezekiah deliver up Padii, king of Ekron, who had been carried prisoner to Jerusalem. The accounts in Chronicles refer to David’s taking Gath (1 Chron 18:1), which was recovered later, and again taken by Uzziah (2 Chron 26:6). The Philistines sent gifts to Jehoshaphat (17:11), but invaded the Shephelah (28:18) in the time of Ahaz.”

The Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary observes: ““By the end of David’s reign their power had begun to decline significantly. By the time Jehoshaphat was made king of Judah (873 B.C. - 848 B.C.), the Philistines were paying tribute (2 Chron 17:11), although they tried to become independent under Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram (2 Chron 21:16-17).”

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary states about the chapter before us: “From the contents of this prophecy and its position among the oracles against the nations, we can draw no more than a very probable inference that it was not published before the fourth year of Jehoiakim, inasmuch as it is evidently but a further amplification of the sentence pronounced in that year against all the nations, and recorded in ch. 25. Thus all conjectures as to the capture of Gaza by Necho on his march to the Euphrates, before the battle at Carchemish, become very precarious. But the assumption is utterly improbable also, that Necho at a later period, whether in his flight before the Chaldeans, or afterwards, while Nebuchadnezzar was occupied in Babylon, undertook an expedition against Philistia: such a hypothesis is irreconcilable with the statement given in 2 Kings 24. There is thus no course left open for us, but to understand, by the Pharaoh of the title here, not Necho, but his successor Hophra ... From these notices, it appears pretty certain that Pharaoh-Hophra sought to avenge the defeat of Necho on the Chaldeans, and to extend the power of Egypt in Asia. Hence it is also very probable that he took Gaza, with the view of getting into his hands this key of the highway to Egypt. This assumption we regard as the most probable, since nothing has been made out against it; there are no sufficient grounds for the opinion that this prophecy belongs to the same time as that in ch. 46.”

The Babylonian invasion is depicted as a flashflood that engulfed the coastal area of Philistia. In it the Philistine cities would be swallowed up and the inhabitants would drown. At the end of v.2 the image changes into the reality of the approaching Babylonian cavalry. In modern terms this would amount to tanks

6. I Sam. 4-6
1. I Sam. 7:3
2. I Sam. 9:16
3. I Sam. 17:1-54

moving in and mowing down everything in their way. There is a note of compassion in the phrase: “Fathers will not turn to help their children; their hands will hang limp.” It is a father’s natural instinct to want to protect his children. When a man is prevented by the sheer force to do so, when he sees his child perish without being able to stretch out his hand, it become is nightmarish image that pursues him for the rest of his life.

Although the text suggest that there would be no survivors, their extermination would evidently not be complete, since there are some left in Gaza and Ashkelon to observe the pagan rituals of mourning.

V.5 presents some problems of translation. The Hebrew text reads literally: “Baldness is come upon Gaza; Ashkelon is cut off with the remnant of the valley; how long will you cut yourself?” The Hebrew word rendered “cut off” is *damah*, which can mean “to be silent,” “to fail,” or “to perish.” In the latter sense we find it in: “But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that *perish*.”¹ Jeremiah uses the verb elsewhere in connection with weeping: “Speak this word to them: ‘Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day *without ceasing*; for my virgin daughter — my people — has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow.’”² *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “This phrase is difficult to understand. The LXX reads, O remnant of the Anakim, which represents a change of only one Hebrew letter. The Anakim were aboriginal dwellers in Palestine (cf. Josh 11:21-22).”

The New International Version, in an effort to make sense of vv.6 and 7, adds [*you cry*], as if the words “Ah, sword of the Lord, how long till you rest?” were an outcry of the Philistines and could not be spoken by Jeremiah. There seems to be no reason to believe that Jeremiah, or God, would be incapable of compassion for Philistines who were perishing. If the spanking of a child hurts the father more than the child, why would God’s wrath not be at odds with His love and mercy? We know it does.

III. AGAINST MOAB48:1-47

1 Concerning Moab: This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "Woe to Nebo, for it will be ruined. Kiriathaim will be disgraced and captured; the stronghold will be disgraced and shattered.

2 Moab will be praised no more; in Heshbon men will plot her downfall: 'Come, let us put an end to that nation.' You too, O Madmen, will be silenced; the sword will pursue you.

3 Listen to the cries from Horonaim, cries of great havoc and destruction.

4 Moab will be broken; her little ones will cry out.

5 They go up the way to Luhith, weeping bitterly as they go; on the road down to Horonaim anguished cries over the destruction are heard.

6 Flee! Run for your lives; become like a bush in the desert.

7 Since you trust in your deeds and riches, you too will be taken captive, and Chemosh will go into exile, together with his priests and officials.

8 The destroyer will come against every town, and not a town will escape. The valley will be ruined and the plateau destroyed, because the Lord has spoken.

9 Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste; her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them.

10 "A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord's work! A curse on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed!

11 "Moab has been at rest from youth, like wine left on its dregs, not poured from one jar to another — she has not gone into exile. So she tastes as she did, and her aroma is unchanged.

12 But days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will send men who pour from jars, and they will pour her out; they will empty her jars and smash her jugs.

1. Ps. 49:12

2. Jer. 14:17

13 Then Moab will be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed when they trusted in Bethel.

14 "How can you say, 'We are warriors, men valiant in battle'?"

15 Moab will be destroyed and her towns invaded; her finest young men will go down in the slaughter," declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty.

16 "The fall of Moab is at hand; her calamity will come quickly.

17 Mourn for her, all who live around her, all who know her fame; say, 'How broken is the mighty scepter, how broken the glorious staff!'

18 "Come down from your glory and sit on the parched ground, O inhabitants of the Daughter of Dibon, for he who destroys Moab will come up against you and ruin your fortified cities.

19 Stand by the road and watch, you who live in Aroer. Ask the man fleeing and the woman escaping, ask them, 'What has happened?'

20 Moab is disgraced, for she is shattered. Wail and cry out! Announce by the Arnon that Moab is destroyed.

21 Judgment has come to the plateau — to Holon, Jahzah and Mephaath,

22 to Dibon, Nebo and Beth Diblathaim,

23 to Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul and Beth Meon,

24 to Kerioth and Bozrah — to all the towns of Moab, far and near.

25 Moab's horn is cut off; her arm is broken," declares the Lord.

26 "Make her drunk, for she has defied the Lord. Let Moab wallow in her vomit; let her be an object of ridicule.

27 Was not Israel the object of your ridicule? Was she caught among thieves, that you shake your head in scorn whenever you speak of her?

28 Abandon your towns and dwell among the rocks, you who live in Moab. Be like a dove that makes its nest at the mouth of a cave.

29 "We have heard of Moab's pride — her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and arrogance and the haughtiness of her heart.

30 I know her insolence but it is futile," declares the Lord, "and her boasts accomplish nothing.

31 Therefore I wail over Moab, for all Moab I cry out, I moan for the men of Kir Hareseth.

32 I weep for you, as Jazer weeps, O vines of Sibmah. Your branches spread as far as the sea; they reached as far as the sea of Jazer. The destroyer has fallen on your ripened fruit and grapes.

33 Joy and gladness are gone from the orchards and fields of Moab. I have stopped the flow of wine from the presses; no one treads them with shouts of joy. Although there are shouts, they are not shouts of joy.

34 "The sound of their cry rises from Heshbon to Elealeh and Jahaz, from Zoar as far as Horonaim and Eglath Shelishiyah, for even the waters of Nimrim are dried up.

35 In Moab I will put an end to those who make offerings on the high places and burn incense to their gods," declares the Lord.

36 "So my heart laments for Moab like a flute; it laments like a flute for the men of Kir Hareseth. The wealth they acquired is gone.

37 Every head is shaved and every beard cut off; every hand is slashed and every waist is covered with sackcloth.

38 On all the roofs in Moab and in the public squares there is nothing but mourning, for I have broken Moab like a jar that no one wants," declares the Lord.

39 "How shattered she is! How they wail! How Moab turns her back in shame! Moab has become an object of ridicule, an object of horror to all those around her."

40 This is what the Lord says: "Look! An eagle is swooping down, spreading its wings over Moab.

41 Kerioth will be captured and the strongholds taken. In that day the hearts of Moab's warriors will be like the heart of a woman in labor.

42 Moab will be destroyed as a nation because she defied the Lord.

43 Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of Moab," declares the Lord.

44 "Whoever flees from the terror will fall into a pit, whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare; for I will bring upon Moab the year of her punishment," declares the Lord.

45 "In the shadow of Heshbon the fugitives stand helpless, for a fire has gone out from Heshbon, a blaze from the midst of Sihon; it burns the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of the noisy boasters.

46 Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh are destroyed; your sons are taken into exile and your daughters into captivity.

47 "Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come," declares the Lord. Here ends the judgment on Moab.

Compared to the judgment over Moab, the condemnation of Philistia seems to be mild. The verdict over Moab is severe, although she is not threatened with complete annihilation as the Philistines were.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes the following introduction to this chapter: "The land of Moab comprised the rich elevated plateau east of the Dead Sea between the wadis Arnon and Zered. The Moabites traced their origin to Lot (Gn. 19:37), and in the patriarchal period they were generally friendly towards the Israelites. Moabite women beguiled the Chosen People into idolatry just before the crossing of the Jordan at Jericho (Nu. 25:1–3), and from that time onwards there was intermittent war between the two peoples (cf. Jdg. 3:12–30; 1 Sa. 14:47) until David made them tributaries (2 Sa. 8:2,12). In the late eighth century Assyria conquered the Moabites, but when the empire collapsed Moab regained its independence. It was again subdued by Nebuchadnezzar after 581 BC, and later came under Persian and Arab influence. In the Old Testament prophesies Moab was generally regarded as under divine judgment (cf. Is. 15 – 16; 25:10; Je. 9:26; 25:21; 27:3; Ezk. 35:8–11; Am. 2:1–3; Zp. 2:8–11). Jeremiah seems to summarize what its predecessors have said, adapting the earlier material to seventh-century BC conditions, especially the citations from Isaiah 15 – 16."

As mentioned above, the Moabites were related to the Israelites through Lot, Abraham's nephew. Moab was the son of Lot's oldest daughter. He was conceived through an incestuous relationship, as was his nephew Ammon. Both of Lot's daughters made their father have sex with them, after making him drunk. We read about the birth of Moab: "So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today."¹ Lot's daughters grew up in Sodom and inherited the spirit of Sodom. The Moabites and Ammonites exhibited the sins of Sodom in their idolatry and lifestyle throughout their history.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about Moab's religion: "The chief deity of Moab was Chemosh (kemosh), frequently mentioned in the Old Testament and on the Moabite Stone, where King Mesha speaks of building a high place in his honor because he was saved by him from his enemies. He represents the oppression of Moab by Omri as the result of the anger of Chemosh, and Mesha made war against Israel by command of Chemosh. He was the national god of Moab, as Molech was of Ammon, and it is pretty certain that he was propitiated by human sacrifices (2 Kings 3:27). But he was not the only god of Moab, as is clear from the account in Num 25, where it is also clear that their idolatrous worship was corrupt. They had their Baalim like the nations around, as may be inferred from the place-names compounded with Baal, such as Bamoth-baal, Beth-baal-meon and Baal-peor."

Friction between Moab and Israel began when the Israelites were on their way to Canaan. By divine injunction the Israelites did not challenge the Moabites in their advance to the Promised Land as Moses states in Deuteronomy: "Then the Lord said to me, 'Do not harass the Moabites or provoke them to war, for I will not give you any part of their land. I have given Ar to the descendants of Lot as a possession.'"²

1. Gen. 19:36,37

2. Deut. 2:9

God had told the Israelites: “No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. However, the Lord your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.”¹ The story of Ruth proves that this ban was not absolute. Ruth, the Moabite, was even included in the line of descent that brought Jesus Christ into this world.²

During the reign of Jehoiakim the Moabites, and other surrounding nations, made several raids into Judah. The Lord allowed this to happen because of Jehoiakim’s rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar, to whom he had sworn allegiance, using the Name of YHWH; an oath which he broke. Jeremiah’s prophecy must be seen against the background of Jehoiakim’s betrayal.

In this verdict over Moab God reveals Himself again as *YHWH Elohiym Tsabaa`owt* of Israel, the commander-in-chief of the heavenly armies. That which on earth was played out as Babylonian military forces conquering human kingdoms was in reality the mirror image of a scene that was taking place in the realms of heaven.

Jeremiah cites the names of six towns and cities that were spread out over Moabite territory. That which *The New International Version* calls “the stronghold” is probably the name of a city, Misgab.

Jeremiah uses the Hebrew word *yabesh* to describe the result of the Babylonian invasion. The primary meaning of *yabesh* is “to wither,” or “to dry up.” As such we find it in the verse: “After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had *dried up* from the earth.”³ In the context in which Jeremiah uses it here it means “*to be ashamed*.” That is the way it is used in the story of David mourning the death of his son Absalom: “Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, ‘Today you have *humiliated* all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines.’”⁴ The point made by Jeremiah is that Moab’s sin was pride, which expressed itself in outright rebellion against God.

In the phrase in v.2 – “in Heshbon men will plot her downfall,” is a play-on-words in the Hebrew text, which is difficult to translate: *Cheshbown* (Heshbon) – *chashab* (plot). *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests: “In Plot-house they plot evil against it.” We do not read who would have done the praising of Moab. In all likelihood Moab did her own praising. The idea seems to be that, after Nebuchadnezzar was through with the country Moab would have nothing left to be proud of. There is another play-on-words in the Hebrew phrase “You too, O Madmen, will be silenced.” *Madmen* is the name of the city, probably meaning “dunghill,” and “be silenced” is the translation of the Hebrew word *damam*.

Although the Hebrew text is difficult to translate and Bible scholars have struggled over the meaning of some words, the general idea of panic and havoc is clear enough. People are fleeing for their lives and the wording seems to suggest that God feels compassion in seeing this happen.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about Chemosh: “Chemosh was the principal Moabite deity (Nu. 21:29), and the sacrificing of children was an important part of his cult (2 Ki. 3:27). Solomon erected a high place for Chemosh in Jerusalem (I Ki. 11:7), but it was demolished under Josiah (2 Ki. 23:13).” That Chemosh would go into exile may mean that the Moabites would not give up their worship of this idol even while being taken away from their land. That would be unusual. Most idols were considered local deities who had no power in foreign lands. The fact that the Israelites continued to worship God even in exile set them apart from other nations.

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1. Deut. 23:3-6
 2. Matt. 1:5
 3. Gen. 8:6,7
 4. II Sam. 19:5

The New International Version renders v.9: “Put salt on Moab, for she will be laid waste; her towns will become desolate, with no one to live in them.” A footnote gives the alternate reading: “Give wings to Moab, for she will fly away.” The Hebrew keyword used is *tsiyts*, which is derived from a word meaning “glistening.” It is variously translated “a blossom,” “a flower,” “a [gold] plate,” or “a wing.” R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “MT of verse 9 is obscure, and the noun *sîs* (‘blossom,’ ‘ornament’) only means ‘wing’ in later Hebrew. LXX reads *siyyûn* (‘highway sign’ in 31:21 and ‘grave-marker’ in 2 Ki 23:17), while NEB margin suggests that *sîs* may be a Ugaritic reference to the sowing of cities with salt (cf. Jdg. 9:45). This, however, is uncertain.” The reference in Judges reads: “All that day Abimelech pressed his attack against the city until he had captured it and killed its people. Then he destroyed the city and scattered salt over it.” Sticking to the “wing” translation of *sîs*, *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “So sudden is the blow that Moab stands in need of wings to make good his escape. Were the human instrument to delay, the curse meant for Moab would come upon himself. Is a reason demanded? It is that Moab has long been in a state of morally perilous security, and requires to be thoroughly shaken and aroused, in order that he may discover the inability of Chemosh to help his worshippers.”

V.10 – “A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord’s work! A curse on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed!” has been quoted in part in connection with the great commission to preach the Gospel to the whole world. But that is an example of using Bible verses out of context. For obvious reasons the second part of the verse is not mentioned in that context. It is true that Paul exclaims: “Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”¹

The Adam Clarke’s Commentary comments: “Moab is doomed to destruction, and the Lord pronounces a curse on their enemies if they do not proceed to utter extirpation. God is the Author of life, and has a sovereign right to dispose of it as he pleases; and these had forfeited theirs long ago by their idolatry and other crimes.” It does not seem, however, that the Babylonians needed that kind of divine encouragement. Yet, the phrase speaks of the intensity of God’s wrath toward Moab. It reminds us of the words in Hebrews: “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”²

In vv.11-13 Moab’s self-satisfaction is compared to wine that has not been decanted. In order to improve the quality of wine it must be poured from time to time from one vessel into another. Zephaniah uses the same image of complacency in connection with the people of Jerusalem, saying: “At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad.’”³ There is some shaking up that is beneficial to our spiritual life and fellowship with God. But that is not the lesson contained in this prophecy. As R. K. Harrison observes in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*: “The Moabite wine will not be decanted carefully in the time of crisis, but will be emptied wantonly ... The Moabites will be disillusioned about Chemosh because in time of danger their national deity will be powerless to help them. The issue is made more pointed by reference to the fate of Israel.”

V.13 may be the most hope giving verse in this severe chapter. If Moab is ashamed of Chemosh, they return to a sense of reality and experience conviction of sin. From “what have I done” to “what must I do” is a small step that can lead to forgiveness and salvation. It seems, however, that the comparison with Israel’s use of the gold calf in Bethel (and Dan) is lopsided. King Jeroboam used the calf statues as a representation of God and the temple in Jerusalem. Jeroboam’s sin was that he broke with God’s revelation of Himself. He was driven by fear that the people would return to King Rehoboam of Judah and evict him of

1. I Cor. 9:16

2. Heb. 10:31

3. Zeph. 1:12

the throne God had given to him. This would, however, ultimately lead to outright idolatry. The comparison is in the shame both nations felt when God’s judgment hit them, not in the object of their worship.

It is not stated who asks the question “How can you say, ‘We are warriors, men valiant in battle?’” The context suggests that it is the King *YHWH Tsabaa`owt*. The Hebrew word translated “warriors” is *Gibbowriym*. The first time this word is used in Scripture is in the verse that describes mankind before the flood of Noah: “The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the *heroes* of old, men of renown.”¹ Moab may have boasted to be like these prehistoric giants. The Philistines used the word for Goliath.² And it is applied to the *mighty men* with which David had surrounded himself.³ But Moab’s heroes were no match for Nebuchadnezzar’s mighty army.

V.15 has presented problems of translation. *The New King James Version* renders it: “‘Moab is plundered and gone up from her cities; Her chosen young men have gone down to the slaughter,’ says the King, Whose name is the Lord of hosts.” *The New International Version*: “‘Moab will be destroyed and her towns invaded; her finest young men will go down in the slaughter,’ declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty.” *Barnes’ Notes* suggests: “‘Moab is spoiled,’ and her cities have gone up, i.e., in smoke, have been burned (Josh 8:20-21). Others render, ‘The waster of Moab and of her towns is coming up to the attack, and her chosen youths are gone down to the slaughter.’”

God invites Moab’s neighbors to mourn her destruction. That invitation served to them as a warning, that what happened to the mightiest among them could easily happen to them also. Confession, repentance and humility could save the surrounding nations if they paid attention to what happened to those who boast in their might. The “mighty scepter” and “glorious staff” are symbolic for Moab’s national pride and for the oppression of her neighbors. Another picture of Moab’s domination is the horn mentioned in v.25. All these implements of boast are broken and destroyed.

The Pulpit Commentary comments on vv.17-25: “How lamentable that such a glorious scepter should be broken! But there is no remedy. Even Dibon, that highly honored town, is disgraced. There is no hiding the sad fate of the Moabites; the crowds of fugitives sufficiently proclaim it. Judgment has been passed upon all the cities of Moab, a long roll of whose names is recited.”

Jeremiah’s description of the disaster is very vivid. He is like a reporter observing the ongoing war of destruction and interviewing the victims who pass by him on their flight from the cities.

Vv.26 and 27 state the principle points of accusation against Moab. She had defied the Lord and ridiculed Israel. The issue is the fact that God had chosen Israel to be the nation through whom He revealed Himself in this world. Moab had mocked Israel for the fact that she believed that YHWH was more than a national deity whose power and influence went well beyond the boundaries of Canaan. Moab refused to accept that YHWH was the Lord of heaven and earth. Nebuchadnezzar, who conquered Moab, would come to the realization that Moab refused to accept. As we read in Daniel: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”⁴

Jeremiah had earlier used the image of drunkenness as a symbol of the effect the wrath of God would have upon the nations. We read: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them.’”⁵ Isaiah also used

1. Gen. 6:4
2. I Sam. 17:51
3. I Chron. 11:10ff.
4. Dan. 4:37
5. Jer. 25:15,16

the image of drunkenness and hangovers in connection with the judgment over Judah. We read: “And these also stagger from wine and reel from beer: Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine; they reel from beer, they stagger when seeing visions, they stumble when rendering decisions. All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.”¹ These pictures of physical abuse and filth illustrate God’s reaction of revulsion to the moral filth of those who fall under His judgment.

The image of Moab’s refugees hiding in caves brings Moab back to the place and conditions under which she was conceived and born. After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, we read about Lot and his daughters: “Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave.”²

V.29 is an almost literal quotation of Isaiah: “We have heard of Moab’s pride —her overweening pride and conceit, her pride and her insolence — but her boasts are empty.”³ R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “Both Isaiah and Jeremiah may have preserved in a loose fashion popular saying about the notorious pride of the Moabites.” But Jeremiah gives the words as those of God over Moab. The Hebrew text reads literally: “‘I know,’ says the Lord, ‘his wrath, but it shall not be; so his lies so it shall not affect it.’”

About the word “lies,” *bad* in Hebrew, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “This is a case in which the accentuation must most decidedly be deviated from; it implies a faulty view of the word rendered in the Authorized Version, ‘his lies.’ But the rendering of our version is neither in itself tenable nor is it that intended by the accentuation. The rendering suggested by the latter is ‘his praters’ (*i.e.* soothsayers), as the word, no doubt, must be taken in ... Jeremiah 1:36; ... Isaiah 44:25. But it is much more natural to render thus: ‘And the untruth of his pratings [*i.e.* of his boastings]; the untruth that they have wrought.’ In his words and in his works (and a word is equal to a work before the Divine Judge) Moab was essentially ‘untrue.’ Truth, in the Biblical sense, is to know and serve the true God.”

Vv.31-33 contain another lament without mentioning who intones it. Again, Jeremiah follows Isaiah closely with the same kind of dirge: “Therefore the Moabites wail, they wail together for Moab. Lament and grieve for the men of Kir Hareseth. The fields of Heshbon wither, the vines of Sibmah also. The rulers of the nations have trampled down the choicest vines, which once reached Jazer and spread toward the desert. Their shoots spread out and went as far as the sea. So I weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. O Heshbon, O Elealeh, I drench you with tears! The shouts of joy over your ripened fruit and over your harvests have been stilled. Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses, for I have put an end to the shouting.”⁴ Isaiah indicates more clearly that the Moabites initially do the wailing, but then he picks up the chant himself, saying: “So I weep, as Jazer weeps.” Since both men were prophets who were “carried along by the Holy Spirit,”⁵ they gave expression to God’s sadness over Moab.

In all of this wine continues to play a role. In the previous section it was the excess of wine that caused drunkenness as an illustration of moral filth; here we are led back to the vineyard where the grapes used to be harvested and the people rejoiced in anticipation of the “wine that gladdens the heart of man.”⁶ As in the previous picture, something is wrong. As there is no joy in hangovers, so the shouts of the vineyard are not shouts of joy.

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1. Isa. 28:7,8
 2. Gen. 19:30
 3. Isa. 16:6
 4. Isa. 16:7-10
 5. II Peter 1:21
 6. Ps. 104:15

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v.33: “‘Shouting’ (Hebrew, *hedad*) may be taken in two senses: (1) the cheerful, musical cry with which ‘the treaders’ pressed out the juice of the grapes (comp. ...Jeremiah 25:30); (2) the wild cry (...Jeremiah 51:14) with which the enemy ‘fell upon the summer fruits and upon the vintage’ (ver. 32), reducing the inhabitants to abject misery. In ...Isaiah 16:9, 10 an allusion is made to this double meaning, and so, perhaps, it may be here (‘There shall be shouting, but not that of the peaceful vintagers at their work’). Or, as others, we may explain ‘no shouting’ as equivalent to ‘the opposite of shouting,’ *i.e.* either silence or lamentation (comp. ...Isaiah 10:15, ‘not wood’ equivalent to ‘that which is specifically different from wood;’ and 31:3, ‘not God,’ equivalent to ‘the very opposite of Divine’).”

The Hebrew text of v.34 reads literally: “From the cry of Heshbon even unto Elealeh, and even unto Jahaz have they uttered their voice, even from Zoar unto Horonaim, as a heifer of three years old: for also the waters of Nimrim shall be desolate.” The Hebrew words for a three-year-old heifer are *Eglath Shelishiyah*, which *The New International Version*, with most other modern versions, interprets to be the name of a city.

The horror of the Moabite religion is clearly illustrated in an incident during a war with Israel. We read: “When the king of Moab saw that the battle had gone against him, he took with him seven hundred swordsmen to break through to the king of Edom, but they failed. Then he took his firstborn son, who was to succeed him as king, and offered him as a sacrifice on the city wall. The fury against Israel was great; they withdrew and returned to their own land.”¹ That is the kind of practice God wanted to put an end to.

In vv.36-39 it is clearly God who laments the fate of Moab, although He is the one who is breaking Moab to pieces in the same way as Jeremiah smashed the clay jar to pieces in an earlier chapter.² The flute was used to accompany the wail of a funeral procession. There were flute players at the house of Jairus when his daughter had died.³ Here it is God Himself who plays the flute. The shaved heads, cut off beards, slashed hands and sackcloth are all pagan signs of mourning that were forbidden to the Jews.

Moab that was so proud of her own status and achievements would become the object of ridicule for her neighbors.

The eagle swooping down over Moab and picking it up as a prey is the Babylonian army invading and devastating the country. Moses had used the same image as a warning to Israel to indicate what would happen to them if they abandoned the Lord. He said: “The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.”⁴ In the next chapter, Jeremiah uses the same words to describe Nebuchadnezzar’s invasion of Edom.⁵

The accusation against Moab, which was mentioned earlier, was that she had defied the Lord in ignoring God’s revelation of Himself in Jerusalem and in persisting in her worship of Chemosh. They had become so enmeshed in their idolatry that they earned the name “the people of Chemosh.” It is difficult for us to imagine how a human being can revere a deity that demands the sacrifices of people’s own children.

The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary comments on the words in v.47 “‘Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come,’ declares the Lord”: “Restoration promised to Moab for righteous Lot’s sake, their progenitor (Gen 19:37; Ex 20:6; Ps 89:30-33). Compare the same promise of restoration as to Egypt, Jer 46:26; Ammon, Jer 49:6; Elam, Jer 49:39. Gospel blessings, temporal and spiritual, to the Gentiles in the last days are intended.”

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1. II Kings 3:26,27
 2. Jer. 19:1-11
 3. Matt. 9:23
 4. Deut. 28:49,50
 5. See Jer. 49:22.

IV. AGAINST AMMON 49:1-6

1 Concerning the Ammonites: This is what the Lord says: "Has Israel no sons? Has she no heirs? Why then has Molech taken possession of Gad? Why do his people live in its towns?"

2 But the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will sound the battle cry against Rabbah of the Ammonites; it will become a mound of ruins, and its surrounding villages will be set on fire. Then Israel will drive out those who drove her out," says the Lord.

3 "Wail, O Heshbon, for Ai is destroyed! Cry out, O inhabitants of Rabbah! Put on sackcloth and mourn; rush here and there inside the walls, for Molech will go into exile, together with his priests and officials.

4 Why do you boast of your valleys, boast of your valleys so fruitful? O unfaithful daughter, you trust in your riches and say, 'Who will attack me?'

5 I will bring terror on you from all those around you," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty. "Every one of you will be driven away, and no one will gather the fugitives.

6 "Yet afterward, I will restore the fortunes of the Ammonites," declares the Lord.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this brief chapter with the comment: "Like the Moabites, the Ammonites were regarded as emerging from a background of incest (Gn. 19:38), but despite this the Israelites were commanded to treat them kindly (Dt. 2:19). In the Settlement period the Ammonites had the Moabites as their southern neighbors, along with the Reubenites, while the tribe of Gad was located to the north-west. In this oracle the Ammonites, described in terms of their god, are censured for their greed in robbing the Gadites of certain territorial holdings, an incident which apparently occurred when the tribe of Gad and other Transjordanian people were made captive by Tiglathpileser III (2 Ki. 15:29). The Ammonites assumed that the owners would never reoccupy it, ignoring the issue raised in verse 1 that descendants of the captives would return one day and claim the land."

There are several points in this prophecy that merit closer attention. First of all, the Lord's contention is not primarily with the people of Ammon, but with their idol Molech. Molech, like Chemosh, demanded human sacrifices, as is clear from the warning God issued to the Israelites before they entered Canaan. We read: "Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."¹ This judgment against Ammon must be seen against the background of the war between God and Satan in whatever form the enemy may demonstrate himself on earth.

Secondly, as with the prophecy about the Moabites, the people of Ammon are identified with their idol Molech. Ammon is called "the people of Molech." Every human being bears the image of the god he worships. As the Psalmist sang: "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."² Those who worship God "have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."³

Thirdly, Ammon, like Moab, not only mocked Israel as a nation chosen by God to reveal Himself on earth, but they took advantage of God's punishment of Israel by grabbing the land that God had promised to His people. The Ammonites believed they had a historic claim to the area occupied by the tribe of Gad, as is evident from their confrontation with Jephthah, centuries earlier. We read: "The king of the Ammonites

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1. Lev. 18:21
 2. Ps. 115:3-8
 3. Col. 3:9,10

answered Jephthah's messengers, 'When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably.'"¹

Barnes' Notes states about Ammon: "They seem to have been far less civilized than the Moabites, and possessed but one stronghold, Rabbah, not devoting themselves to agriculture, but wandering with their flocks over the Arabian wastes. When, however, Tiglath-Pileser carried the inhabitants of Gilead into captivity, the Ammonites occupied much of the vacant land, and many of them probably adopted a more settled life; at this time they even possessed Heshbon, once the frontier town between Reuben and Gad. It is this seizure of the territory of Gad which forms the starting-point of Jeremiah's prediction."

The Ammonites committed gruesome crimes that went well beyond the stealing of land belonging to Israel. We learn from Amos' earlier prophecy that they "ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead in order to extend his borders."² God took the crimes of both Moab and Ammon as personal insults against Him. We read in Zephaniah: "'I have heard the insults of Moab and the taunts of the Ammonites, who insulted my people and made threats against their land. Therefore, as surely as I live,' declares the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, 'surely Moab will become like Sodom, the Ammonites like Gomorrah — a place of weeds and salt pits, a wasteland forever. The remnant of my people will plunder them; the survivors of my nation will inherit their land.' This is what they will get in return for their pride, for insulting and mocking the people of the Lord Almighty. The Lord will be awesome to them when he destroys all the gods of the land. The nations on every shore will worship him, every one in its own land."³

Fourthly, God's promises to Israel were irrevocable. The Promised Land was theirs from generation to generation. Even the sins of Israel against God could not change this. God said that the Ammonites would be driven out by God, a feat which never happened physically in that part of world history. We could compare this promise to what Micah predicted about the conquest of Mareshah, a city in the territory of Judah: "I will bring a conqueror against you who live in Mareshah. He who is the glory of Israel will come to Adullam."⁴ In the confrontation between God and Satan, whose representative Molech was in the land of Ammon, the glory of God would come and conquer.

The mention of Ai has caused trouble for Bible scholars, because the Ai we know was not located in Ammonite territory. There may have been another town by that name, or this may be a copying error in the text. The point of mourning, however, is clear enough. The Ammonites would be taken into captivity and they would carry their idol Molech with them in the same way as the Moabites did with Chemosh.

The Ammonites were proud of their country of fruitful valleys, adopting an attitude of pride, as if they had created their own country. Such an attitude was just as nonsensical as if the Swiss would be as proud of their mountains, as if they made them themselves.

V.6 reveals the same kind of compassion for the people He punishes as was shown in previous cases.

V. AGAINST EDOM 49:7-22

7 Concerning Edom: This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed?"

8 Turn and flee, hide in deep caves, you who live in Dedan, for I will bring disaster on Esau at the time I punish him.

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1. Judg. 11:13
 2. Amos 1:13
 3. Zeph. 2:8-11
 4. Micah 1:15

9 If grape pickers came to you, would they not leave a few grapes? If thieves came during the night, would they not steal only as much as they wanted?

10 But I will strip Esau bare; I will uncover his hiding places, so that he cannot conceal himself. His children, relatives and neighbors will perish, and he will be no more.

11 Leave your orphans; I will protect their lives. Your widows too can trust in me."

12 This is what the Lord says: "If those who do not deserve to drink the cup must drink it, why should you go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, but must drink it.

13 I swear by myself," declares the Lord, "that Bozrah will become a ruin and an object of horror, of reproach and of cursing; and all its towns will be in ruins forever."

14 I have heard a message from the Lord: An envoy was sent to the nations to say, "Assemble yourselves to attack it! Rise up for battle!"

15 "Now I will make you small among the nations, despised among men.

16 The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down," declares the Lord.

17 "Edom will become an object of horror; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds.

18 As Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, along with their neighboring towns," says the Lord, "so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it.

19 "Like a lion coming up from Jordan's thickets to a rich pastureland, I will chase Edom from its land in an instant. Who is the chosen one I will appoint for this? Who is like me and who can challenge me? And what shepherd can stand against me?"

20 Therefore, hear what the Lord has planned against Edom, what he has purposed against those who live in Teman: The young of the flock will be dragged away; he will completely destroy their pasture because of them.

21 At the sound of their fall the earth will tremble; their cry will resound to the Red Sea.

22 Look! An eagle will soar and swoop down, spreading its wings over Bozrah. In that day the hearts of Edom's warriors will be like the heart of a woman in labor.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes the following introduction to this section: "Edom was the Transjordanian territory occupied by Esau's descendants, and formerly known as the land of Seir (Gn. 32:3; Nu. 24:19). It extended from the wadi Zered to the gulf of Aqabah for about 100 miles, and included the wilderness of Edom. Though not uniformly fertile it had good areas of cultivation (Nu. 20:17,19). The King's Highway (Nu. 20:14–18) passed along the eastern plateau of Edom. Edomite kings who succeeded the tribal chieftains of the patriarchal period (Gn. 36:15–19, 40–43) were hostile to Israel (Nu. 20:14–21; Jdg. 11:17ff.), but despite this the Hebrews were forbidden to abuse them (Dt. 23:7f.). This prophecy, like that concerning Moab, comprises poetic stanzas interspersed with prose utterances. It recapitulates the general sentiments of the pre-exile prophets, especially the denunciations of Obadiah. The theme is that no mercy will be shown this traditional foe of Israel, because divine judgment will be final and complete."

Edom was the object of several prophetic denunciations even before Jeremiah's time. Obadiah and Isaiah predicted judgment upon Israel's twin nation, as did Ezekiel and Malachi at a later time. In this chapter Jeremiah borrowed some of Obadiah's language, as in his reference to Edom's wise men. We read in Obadiah: "In that day," declares the Lord, "will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?"¹ Vv.9 and 10 also are an almost word-for-word copy of Obadiah 5 and 6.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about Edom's claim to wisdom: "Teman was celebrated for its 'wisdom,' i.e. for a practical moral philosophy, similar to that which we find in the less distinctly religions

1. Obad. 8

portions of the Book of Proverbs. It was this ‘wisdom’ which formed the common element in the higher culture of the Semitic peoples, and of which the sacred narrator speaks when he says that ‘Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country’ (1 Kings 4:30).” Esau’s secular wisdom never brought him in the right relationship with God. Paul’s words about God’s wisdom and worldly wisdom certainly apply here. We read: “‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”¹

The Hebrew of v.10 reads literally: “But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is spoiled and his brethren, and his neighbors, and he is not.” Several of the Hebrew words refer to physical nakedness. The word *chasaph*, for instance, “made bear,” occurs in Isaiah’s prophecy about Egypt: “So the king of Assyria will lead away stripped and barefoot the Egyptian captives and Cushite exiles, young and old, with buttocks *bared* — to Egypt’s shame.”² Jeremiah uses it in the verse: “I will *pull up* your skirts over your face that your shame may be seen.”³ “Uncovered” is the translation of the Hebrew word *galah*, which we find in the verse about Noah: “When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay *uncovered* inside his tent.”⁴ The Hebrew word for “seed,” *zera`* refers both to plant seed as to human offspring or semen, as in the verses: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your *offspring* and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel”⁵ and in “But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother’s wife, he spilled his *semen* on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord’s sight; so he put him to death also.”⁶

Although the picture drawn is of a naked human body, the object of shame is the people of Edom as a whole and the condition of the country after Nebuchadnezzar would be through with it.

Barnes’ Notes observes about v.11: “As with Moab (Jer 48:47), and Ammon (Jer 49:6), so there is mercy for Edom. The widows shall be protected, and in the orphans of Edom the nation shall once again revive.”

Jeremiah had earlier used the image of a cup of wine as a picture of the wrath of God that would bring disaster upon Jerusalem. We read: “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it.’ ‘See, I am beginning to bring disaster on the city that bears my Name, and will you indeed go unpunished? You will not go unpunished, for I am calling down a sword upon all who live on the earth, declares the Lord Almighty.’”⁷ Judah and Jerusalem had merited that punishment, because they had allowed themselves to be seduced by the idolatry of the surrounding nations. They had been meant to be the channel of God’s salvation for those who did not know God, but instead of bringing healing to the sick world in which they lived that had been infected with the same deadly disease.

When Jesus was on His way to Golgotha, He used words similar to those Jeremiah uses here. We read: “A large number of people followed him, including women who mourned and wailed for him. Jesus turned and said to them, ‘Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your

1. I Cor. 1: 19,20-22
2. Isa. 20:4
3. Jer. 13:26
4. Gen. 9:21
5. Gen. 3:15
6. Gen. 38:9,10
7. Jer. 25:15,29

children. For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ Then ‘they will say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us!’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us!’ For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?’”¹ In that context Jesus was the “green tree,” the person who took the cup of God’s wrath and drank it in behalf of the whole world. In John’s Gospel, Jesus had given to Nicodemus the reason for this: “For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”²

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about vv.14-16: “This section parallels Obadiah 1–4. The prediction concerning the lessened stature of Edom saw its initial fulfillment in the third century BC, when Edom was overrun by Nabathaeans. The Edomites who fled to Judea were later subdued by Judas Maccabaeus (I Macc. 5:65) and incorporated into the Jewish people by John Hyrcanus. The Edomites had long enjoyed a reputation for rugged military strength, but their trust in physical prowess would fail them at the critical moment. The *rock* (16) is probably Umm el-Biyara, a site overlooking Petra, the Edomite capital.”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia writes about Petra, or Sela: “‘The rock’ (the Revised Version margin ‘Sela’) in Obad 3, in the phrase ‘thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock,’ is only a vivid and picturesque description of Mt. Edom. ‘The purple mountains into which the wild sons of Esau clambered run out from Syria upon the desert, some hundred miles by twenty, of porphyry and red sandstone. They are said to be the finest rock scenery in the world The interior is reached by defiles so narrow that two horsemen may scarcely ride abreast, and the sun is shut out by the overhanging rocks. Little else than wild fowls’ nests are, the villages: human aeries perched on high shelves or hidden away in caves at the ends of the deep gorges.”³

The Hebrew text of v.14 provides an interesting reading: “I have heard a rumor from the Lord, and an ambassador is sent unto the heathen, saying, Gather ye together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle.” The word for “envoy,” or “ambassador” is *tsiyr*, which has the primary meaning of “a hinge.” It can also mean “pain,” as in the verse: “His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor *pains*.”⁴ We also find it in the verse: “As a door turns on its *hinges*, so a sluggard turns on his bed.”⁵ Then it has the added meaning of “envoy,” as in: “A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy *envoy* brings healing.”⁶ The different shades of meaning of the Hebrew word make it impossible to convey all the emotional meanings in English. The “hinge-meaning” gives to the judgment a basis of cause and effect. It is because of Edom’s behavior toward his brother-nation that this verdict is pronounced. The “pain factor” points not only to Edom’s suffering, but also to the divine emotions that accompany the punishment. The “envoy” must be seen as an angel sent by God in the same way as we read in *Revelation*: “The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath.”⁷

Edom considered itself impregnable because of the rocks and caves into which the soldiers could withdraw and from where they could attack. *Barnes’ Notes* comments on v.16: “Edom’s ‘terribleness’

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1. Luke 23:27-31
 2. John 3:17
 3. Some of the text is a quotation from G.A. Smith. *The Book of the Twelve Prophets*.
 4. I Sam. 4:19
 5. Prov. 13:17
 6. Prov. 26:14
 7. Rev. 14:19

consisted in her cities being hewn in the sides of inaccessible rocks, from where she could suddenly descend for predatory warfare, and retire to her fastnesses without fear of reprisals.”

Jeremiah had earlier used the same kind of language in describing the destruction of Babylon, saying: “I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds.”¹ Those who remember Germany during the glory of the Nazi regime and have seen the bombed out German cities at the end of the Second World War, have a clear picture of what is said here.

As Sodom and Gomorrah went down in history as emblems of sexual perversion, so Edom would become the symbol of fallen human pride. Human arrogance makes this world into a desert, both physically and spiritually.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about “Jordan’s thicket”: “*The jungle of the Jordan (cf. 12:5) was the Zor, one of three physical zones of the Jordan valley, and the haunt of the Asiatic lion and other wild animals in pre-exilic days. God is likened to a ferocious beast leaving his undergrowth den to prey on sheep in nearby pastures. In the same way the enemy will scatter and annihilate the Edomites, whose howls of anguish will be heard as far as the Red Sea.*”

The eagle swooping down upon Edom is Babylon. Jeremiah borrowed here Moses’ words describing what would happen to Israel if she disobeyed God. We read: “The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.”²

The image of a man behaving like a woman in labor is one Jeremiah uses frequently throughout his book. We find it in six other places.³ That which means the joy of life to a woman becomes a death throb for a man.

VI. AGAINST DAMASCUS 49:23-27

23 Concerning Damascus: "Hamath and Arpad are dismayed, for they have heard bad news. They are disheartened, troubled like the restless sea.

24 Damascus has become feeble, she has turned to flee and panic has gripped her; anguish and pain have seized her, pain like that of a woman in labor.

25 Why has the city of renown not been abandoned, the town in which I delight?

26 Surely, her young men will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day," declares the Lord Almighty.

27 "I will set fire to the walls of Damascus; it will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad."

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia writes about Damascus’ history: “The origin of Damascus is unknown ... It appears once-possibly twice-in the history of Abraham. In Gen 14:15 we read that Abraham pursued the four kings as far as Hobah, ‘which is on the left hand (i.e. the north) of Damascus.’ But this is simply a geographical note which shows only that Damascus was well known at the time when Gen 14 was written. Greater interest attaches to Gen 15:2, where Abraham complains that he is childless and that his heir is ‘Dammesek Eliezer’ (English Revised Version), for which the Syriac version reads ‘Eliezer the Damaschul.’ The clause, however, is hopelessly obscure, and it is doubtful whether it contains any reference to Damascus at all. In the time of David Damascus was an Aramean city, which assisted the neighboring Aramean states in their unsuccessful wars against David (2 Sam 8:5 f). These campaigns resulted indirectly in the establishment of a powerful Aramean kingdom in Damascus. Rezon,

1. Jer. 19:8
2. Deut. 28:49,50
3. See Jer. 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6 and 48:41.

son of Eliada, an officer in the army of Hadadezer, king of Zobah, escaped in the hour of defeat, and became a captain of banditti. Later he established himself in Damascus, and became its king (1 Kings 11:23 ff). He cherished a not unnatural animosity against Israel and the rise of a powerful and hostile kingdom in the Israelitish frontier was a constant source of anxiety to Solomon (1 Kings 11:25).”

In its introduction to this section, *The Pulpit Commentary* states about the heading: “The heading *Concerning Damascus* is too limited (like that of the partly parallel prophecy in ...Isaiah 17:1-11); for the prophecy relates, not only to Damascus, the capital of the kingdom of southeastern Aram (or Syria), but to Hamath, the capital of the northern kingdom. (The third of the Aramean kingdoms, that of Zobah, had ceased to exist.) Damascus had already been threatened by Amos (Amos 1:3-5), and by Isaiah (...Isaiah 17:1-11). We may infer from the prophecy that Damascus had provoked the hostility of Nebuchadnezzar, but we have as yet no monumental evidence as to the facts.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, introduces this section about Damascus with: “Divine judgment upon the north is now promised, with Syria’s capital, Damascus, and two small Syrian states, Hamath and Arpad, being specifically mentioned. The latter two fell to the Assyrians prior to 738 BC (*cf.* Is. 10:9; 36:19; 37:13), while Damascus was overthrown in 731 BC (2 Ki. 16:9). Hamath rebelled against Sargon II in 720 BC, but was subdued with little difficulty. 2 Kings 24:2 records that Aramean troops helped to subjugate Judah between 600 and 720 BC, but little else is known of events in seventh-century BC Syria. Hamath, on the Orontes about 110 miles north of Damascus, was on one of the chief trading-routes from Asia Minor to the south. Arpad, in northern Syria, is identified with Tell Rifa’ad, about twenty miles north-west of Aleppo ... Powerful Damascus, the once-proud capital of the Syrian régime (Is. 7:8), is described as enfeebled, referring to its attenuation under the Assyrians when it was incorporated into the province of Hamath, thereby losing its political influence. The remark about the celebrated city (25) is put into the mouth of the citizens of Damascus. ... The name *Benhadad* was born by several Syrian rulers (*cf.* 1 Ki. 15:18; 20:1; 2 Ki. 6:24; 8:7; 13:3), probably three in all though this is somewhat uncertain at present, even by reference to the damaged Benhadad stele found in 1940 at a north Syrian site and now in Aleppo.”

Amos had earlier announced God’s judgment against Damascus, saying: “This is what the Lord says: ‘For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. Because she threshed Gilead with sledges having iron teeth, I will send fire upon the house of Hazael that will consume the fortresses of Ben-Hadad. I will break down the gate of Damascus; I will destroy the king who is in the Valley of Aven and the one who holds the scepter in Beth Eden. The people of Aram will go into exile to Kir,’ says the Lord.”¹

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary observes about Damascus: “Damascus was considered one of the most beautiful cities of ancient times. Its springs make it a large oasis in the Syrian desert.” The Hebrew text of v.25 reads literally: “How is the city of praise not left, the city of my joy!” It is difficult to determine who exclaims this. Some Bible scholars believe that Jeremiah quotes a citizen of the city, others that this expresses Jeremiah’s own sentiment, or the compassion of God.

It seems that by the time Nebuchadnezzar attacked the city, most of the damage predicted by earlier prophets had already been done.

VII. AGAINST KEDAR AND HAZOR 49:28-33

28 Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon attacked: This is what the Lord says: "Arise, and attack Kedar and destroy the people of the East.

29 Their tents and their flocks will be taken; their shelters will be carried off with all their goods and camels. Men will shout to them, 'Terror on every side!'

30 "Flee quickly away! Stay in deep caves, you who live in Hazor," declares the Lord. "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has plotted against you; he has devised a plan against you.

1. Amos 1:3-5

31 "Arise and attack a nation at ease, which lives in confidence," declares the Lord, "a nation that has neither gates nor bars; its people live alone.

32 Their camels will become plunder, and their large herds will be booty. I will scatter to the winds those who are in distant places and will bring disaster on them from every side," declares the Lord.

33 "Hazor will become a haunt of jackals, a desolate place forever. No one will live there; no man will dwell in it."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: "This brief oracle is directed at certain nomadic tribes located in the Syrian desert east of Palestine. They, too, will be punished, and are warned to flee from the worst effects of calamity. *Kedar* (cf. 2:10) designated a nomadic Arab tribe living in the Syro-Arabian desert, but used also to denote Bedouin generally. They bred sheep (Is. 60:7), traded with Phoenicia (Ezk. 27:21) and were skilled archers (Is. 21:16f.). The tribe was mentioned with the Arabs in certain Assyrian inscriptions. *Hazor* was not the celebrated city of northern Palestine, but an area occupied by semi-nomadic Arabs ... The advance against Kedar was that of Nebuchadnezzar in 599 BC, as recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle. The Eastern People had lived in the desert from an early period (cf. Gn. 29:1; Jdg. 6:3; Jb. 1:3). In verse 29 Jeremiah uses a favorite phrase (cf. 6:35; 20:3f., 10) to describe the panic resulting from the unexpected enemy attack. Carefree living was frowned upon in Old Testament times, since even the most heavily fortified location could be overthrown ... Verse 33 was fulfilled when Nebuchadnezzar finally subjugated the tribes and devastated their dwellings.

Since Nebuchadnezzar was the attacker, we may assume that the words "Arise, and attack Kedar and destroy the people of the East" (v.28) and "Arise and attack a nation at ease, which lives in confidence," ... "a nation that has neither gates nor bars; its people live alone" (v.31) are addressed to the Babylonians. Although this sounds like a divine command or approval of an act of aggression, there is also a note of compassion in the mention that these people were not living in walled in cities that could defend themselves.

We read in Judges that the Sidonians in Laish were living in similar carefree conditions at the time when the tribe of Dan sought to establish itself in Canaan. When some people spied out the land, we read: "So the five men left and came to Laish, where they saw that the people were living in safety, like the Sidonians, unsuspecting and secure. And since their land lacked nothing, they were prosperous. Also, they lived a long way from the Sidonians and had no relationship with anyone else. When they returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their brothers asked them, 'How did you find things?' They answered, 'Come on, let's attack them! We have seen that the land is very good. Aren't you going to do something? Don't hesitate to go there and take it over. When you get there, you will find an unsuspecting people and a spacious land that God has put into your hands, a land that lacks nothing whatever.'" That kind of carefree life is typical for nomadic tribes; they could not roam the land and settle at the same time.

We have no indication as to what the sins of these people were that brought the wrath of God upon them. The fact that they had made no provision for defending themselves, evidently, did not mean that they were peaceful people themselves. The Psalmist said about them: "Woe to me that I dwell in Meshech, that I live among the tents of Kedar! Too long have I lived among those who hate peace. I am a man of peace; but when I speak, they are for war."¹ They, evidently, felt that their reputation of being ferocious was more of a protection than city walls could provide.

The Hebrew text of v.30 does not have the word "caves" in it; it merely uses "dwell deep." That these people could find safety in the desert caves, however, is a logical assumption. Yet, these seemingly perfect shelters would prove insufficient to prevent their extinction.

A footnote in *The New International Version* states that the phrase "those who are in distant place," (v.32) can be read: "who clip the hair by their foreheads."

1. Ps. 120:5,6

The Pulpit Commentary states about this: “Herodotus tells us, speaking of the Arabs, ‘Their practice is to cut the hair in a ring, away from the temples’ (3:8); and among the representatives of various nations, colored figures of whom are given in the tomb of Ramses III, we find some with a square place shaved just above the temples. The hair below this shaven place was allowed to grow long, and then plaited into a leek. It is to such customs that Jeremiah alludes here and in ... Jeremiah 9:26; 25:23. A prohibition is directed against them in the Levitical Law (... Leviticus 19:27; 21:5).”

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia states about the topic: “It is well known that among the surrounding heathen nations the hair of childhood or youth was often shaved and consecrated at idolatrous shrines ... Frequently this custom marked an initiatory rite into the service of a divinity (e.g. that of Orotal (Bacchus) in Arabia, Herod. iii.8). It was therefore an abomination of the Gentiles in the eyes of the Jew, which is referred to in Lev 19:27; Jer 9:26; 25:23; 49:32.”

Malachi would confirm later that the land of Hazor had become desolate. We read: “‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ the Lord says. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.’”¹

VIII. AGAINST ELAM 49:34-39

34 *This is the word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah:*

35 *This is what the Lord Almighty says: "See, I will break the bow of Elam, the mainstay of their might.*

36 *I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam's exiles do not go.*

37 *I will shatter Elam before their foes, before those who seek their lives; I will bring disaster upon them, even my fierce anger," declares the Lord. "I will pursue them with the sword until I have made an end of them.*

38 *I will set my throne in Elam and destroy her king and officials," declares the Lord.*

39 *"Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come," declares the Lord.*

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes about this prophecy: “This prophecy is dated in 597 BC, the accession year of Zedekiah (cf. 46:1; 47:1 for the formula). Elam lay east of Babylonia in the plain of Khuzistan, and was an extremely ancient center of civilization. It had fought with various Assyrian rulers, and was ultimately conquered by Ashurbanipal about 640 BC. After he died it regained its independence, and in 540 BC its forces helped to overthrow the Babylonian empire. The oracle refers to some event in Elamite history about which there is little information at the present. Not even the vaunted Elamite archers will be able to resist God’s power (cf. Is. 22:6; Je. 25:25; Ezk. 32:24), and they will be dispersed among other nations because they had provoked divine anger. The *throne* to be set up is that of a righteous God sitting in judgment upon the people. Despite this calamity, Jeremiah’s prophetic universalism can entertain the restoration of Elam, perhaps in the Messianic age.”

Bible scholars are not unanimous in their opinion about who the subject of this short prophecy is. Some believe it is Elam, which was located beyond the Tigris River, east of Babylonia. Others take it to be the place the Greek called Elymais. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* suggests that it is: “Elam proper, or Elymais, nearer Judea than Persia, is probably here meant; it had helped Nebuchadnezzar against Judea; hence, its punishment. It may have been idolatrous, whereas Persia proper was monotheistic mainly.”

Ezekiel also pronounced a prophecy about Elam: “Elam is there, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are slain, fallen by the sword. All who had spread terror in the land of the living went down uncircumcised to the earth below. They bear their shame with those who go down to the pit. A bed is

1. Mal. 1:2,3

made for her among the slain, with all her hordes around her grave. All of them are uncircumcised, killed by the sword. Because their terror had spread in the land of the living, they bear their shame with those who go down to the pit; they are laid among the slain.”¹

The four winds are representative of the world powers of that time. We gather this from Daniel’s vision in which he said: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea.”² The Elamites would be scattered to these four winds, meaning that they would be dispersed among the nations.

The Elamites are mentioned among those who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down and the church of Jesus Christ was born.³ That proves the fulfillment of this prophecy in which God promised Elam: “Yet I will restore the fortunes of Elam in days to come.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “But this would be a meager fulfillment indeed. The fact is that, both in the narrative in the Acts and in this prophecy, the Elamites are chiefly mentioned as representatives of the distant and less civilized Gentile nations, and the fulfillment is granted whenever a similar people to the Elamites is brought to the knowledge of the true religion.”

IX. AGAINST BABYLON 50:1-51:64

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: “The two chapters in this section deal with the downfall of Babylon. Even more than Egypt, this land was thought to be the scourge of the Hebrews, and though it would serve as the rod of divine anger for punishing Judah, its own condemnation was at hand. Most of this material would antedate 539 BC, since the Persians are unmentioned as a world power, and the similarities between these oracles and Isaiah 13 – 14 might even indicate 580 BC as the approximate time of compilation.”

1. The fall of Babylon heralded 50:1-20

1 This is the word the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the prophet concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians:

2 "Announce and proclaim among the nations, lift up a banner and proclaim it; keep nothing back, but say, 'Babylon will be captured; Bel will be put to shame, Marduk filled with terror. Her images will be put to shame and her idols filled with terror.'

3 A nation from the north will attack her and lay waste her land. No one will live in it; both men and animals will flee away.

4 "In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "the people of Israel and the people of Judah together will go in tears to seek the Lord their God.

5 They will ask the way to Zion and turn their faces toward it. They will come and bind themselves to the Lord in an everlasting covenant that will not be forgotten.

6 "My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place.

7 Whoever found them devoured them; their enemies said, 'We are not guilty, for they sinned against the Lord, their true pasture, the Lord, the hope of their fathers.'

8 "Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock.

9 For I will stir up and bring against Babylon an alliance of great nations from the land of the north.

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1. Ezek. 32:24,25
 2. Dan. 7:2,3
 3. Acts 2:9

They will take up their positions against her, and from the north she will be captured. Their arrows will be like skilled warriors who do not return empty-handed.

10 So Babylonia will be plundered; all who plunder her will have their fill," declares the Lord.

11 "Because you rejoice and are glad, you who pillage my inheritance, because you frolic like a heifer threshing grain and neigh like stallions,

12 your mother will be greatly ashamed; she who gave you birth will be disgraced. She will be the least of the nations — a wilderness, a dry land, a desert.

13 Because of the Lord's anger she will not be inhabited but will be completely desolate. All who pass Babylon will be horrified and scoff because of all her wounds.

14 "Take up your positions around Babylon, all you who draw the bow. Shoot at her! Spare no arrows, for she has sinned against the Lord.

15 Shout against her on every side! She surrenders, her towers fall, her walls are torn down. Since this is the vengeance of the Lord, take vengeance on her; do to her as she has done to others.

16 Cut off from Babylon the sower, and the reaper with his sickle at harvest. Because of the sword of the oppressor let everyone return to his own people, let everyone flee to his own land.

17 "Israel is a scattered flock that lions have chased away. The first to devour him was the king of Assyria; the last to crush his bones was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon."

18 Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "I will punish the king of Babylon and his land as I punished the king of Assyria.

19 But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan; his appetite will be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.

20 In those days, at that time," declares the Lord, "search will be made for Israel's guilt, but there will be none, and for the sins of Judah, but none will be found, for I will forgive the remnant I spare.

On the assumption that they could not have been written by Jeremiah, chapters 50 and 51 have been the subject of attack by Bible scholars belonging to the school of "Higher Criticism." The scope of our study does not allow us to go into detail or to refute those who reject the doctrine of biblical inspiration. We take the words in 50:1 – "This is the word the Lord spoke through Jeremiah the prophet concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians," and in 51:59 – "This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign" to be sufficient proof of authenticity.

As elsewhere, Jeremiah borrowed some of Isaiah's language. For instance: "Babylon will be captured; Bel will be put to shame, Marduk filled with terror. Her images will be put to shame and her idols filled with terror" (v.2) corresponds to Isaiah's "Look, here comes a man in a chariot with a team of horses. And he gives back the answer: 'Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground!'"¹ And "'Flee out of Babylon; leave the land of the Babylonians, and be like the goats that lead the flock'" (v.8) is similar to Isaiah's – "Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, 'The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.'"²

Jeremiah predicts the fall of Babylon approximately 70 years before it happened, but he sees it as an accomplished fact. The *New International Version*, with other modern translations, reads "Babylon will be captured; Bel will be put to shame, Marduk filled with terror," but the Hebrew text seems to give little reason to use the future tense. The older versions' "Babylon is captured" appears to be fully justified.

The New Testament truth that Satan, who "prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour"³ is a defeated foe, is well illustrated in this prophecy.

1. Isa. 21:9
2. Isa. 48:20
3. I Peter 5:8

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary observes: “In the spirit Jeremiah sees the fall of Babylon, together with its idols, as if it had actually taken place, and gives the command to proclaim among the nations this event, which brings deliverance for Israel and Judah. The joy over this is expressed in the accumulation of the words for the summons to tell the nations what has happened ... The lifting up of a standard, i.e., of a signal-rod, served for the more rapid spreading of news.... ‘Cause it to be heard’ is intensified by the addition of ‘do not conceal it.’ The thing is to be proclaimed without reserve.... ‘Babylon is taken,’ i.e., conquered, and her idols have become ashamed, inasmuch as, from their inability to save their city, their powerlessness and nullity have come to light. Bel and Merodach are not different divinities, but merely different names for the chief deity of the Babylonians.”

The Hebrew words for “idol” and “image” are *ʾatsab* and *gilluwl*. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes: “The words *her idols* ... seems to have referred originally to dung pellets, and is applied disparagingly to pagan idols in Leviticus 20:30; Deuteronomy 29:17; I Kings 15:12; 21:26, etc. Ezekiel uses the term no fewer than 38 times in as many chapters.”

The fact that Babylon’s idols will be “filled with terror” suggests that not the dead statues are intended but the spiritual powers that are behind them. Demonic forces, such as “the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece, identified in Daniel chapter ten, are the ones meant. Here it is the territorial spirit of Babylon that is put to shame. The fall of Babylon will be the defeat of Satan.

V.3 indicates that Babylon will be turned into a complete desert that will not even support animal life. This is death in its totality.

Vv.4-10 depict the result of the fall of Babylon in images that have not yet been realized. The physical collapse of the Babylonian empire did not have the return of the northern kingdom from captivity, or the conversion of Israel and Judah as a result. The “spirit of grace and supplication,” which Zechariah describes, which will make the Jews mourn over the Son they have pierced, has not yet come upon them.¹

The defeat of Satan, however, will cause all of humanity to seek the Lord in tears and search for the way to Zion, that is come to the place of God’s revelation of Himself on earth. That is what the Apostle John prophesies in Revelation, saying: “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.”²

V.5 mentions “an everlasting covenant.” The Hebrew words are *beriyth ʾowlam*, “perpetual covenant.” The word *beriyth* literally means “cutting.” It refers to the way a pact was made between two parties in which an animal or animals were cut in pieces and both parties would walk between the pieces. This is what God did with Abraham when He promised him that his offspring would possess the land.³ We find the word *ʾowlam* in the story that tells the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, when God said: “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”⁴ The everlasting covenant is the covenant between God, the Father and God, the Son, in which the Son sacrificed Himself and the Father promised to raise Him from the dead. As we read in Hebrews: “May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”⁵ It is this eternal covenant of which we become the participants when we put our trust in what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross.

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1. See Zech. 12:10.
 2. Rev. 1:7
 3. Gen. 15:9-21
 4. Gen. 3:22
 5. Heb. 13:20,21

Vv.6 and 7 depict Israel and Judah as sheep that have gone astray because they followed the wrong shepherds. That made them the prey of their enemies, who denied being guilty when they slaughtered them, because Israel and Judah had abandoned the Lord. *The New International Version*, interestingly, calls the Lord “their true pasture, the Lord, the hope of their fathers.” The Hebrew word, rendered “pasture,” is *naveh*, which literally means “habitation.” *The New King James Version* renders it, more literally: “Because they have sinned against the Lord, the habitation of justice, The Lord, the hope of their fathers.” The thought that the Lord can be both the good shepherd and the green pasture is intriguing.

Although it is true that God’s chosen people abandoned the Lord, the enemy that devoured them is not without guilt. That is the point Jeremiah makes in these chapters.

The call to leave Babylon runs as a thread through the whole Bible. Israel’s history began when “the Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.’”¹ Isaiah picked up the theme that Jeremiah further develops here: “Leave Babylon, flee from the Babylonians! Announce this with shouts of joy and proclaim it. Send it out to the ends of the earth; say, ‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.’”² That the call does not primarily refer to the return from Babylonian captivity is obvious from the fact that Zechariah also used it after the people had already returned. We read: “‘Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven,’ declares the Lord. ‘Come, O Zion! Escape, you who live in the Daughter of Babylon!’”³ Paul’s quotation of the call confirms that it is a matter of spiritual separation. We read: “Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.”⁴ And finally, the Apostle John repeats it in Revelation: “Then I heard another voice from heaven say: ‘Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues.’”⁵

The alliance of great nations (v.9) is detailed in the next chapter where we read: “Prepare the nations for battle against her; summon against her these kingdoms: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander against her; send up horses like a swarm of locusts. Prepare the nations for battle against her — the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their officials, and all the countries they rule.”⁶ When the Persian army took the city all the Jewish captives were still there. It was not until Cyrus issued his great edict that the physical return to the Promised Land could begin.

God wanted the Jews to lead in the escape from Babylon, “like the goats that lead the flock.” The Hebrew word used is *attuwd*, which literally means “a ram,” or figuratively “leaders of the people.” As such they were meant to be the image of the New Testament church of Jesus Christ, the *ecclesia*, the “called-out ones.” The Apostle John defines the meaning of this separation from the world, saying: “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.”⁷

1. Gen. 12:1-3
2. Isa. 48:20
3. Zech. 2:6,7
4. II Cor. 6:17
5. Rev. 18:4
6. Jer. 51:27,28
7. I John 2:15-17

The Medes and Persians would be God’s instrument for the punishment of Babylon. This does not mean that they were any better than the Babylonians. Their attack upon Babylon would not be inspired by a desire for righteousness, but by hatred. At the end of time, a similar event will take place when Satan and the Antichrist will turn against each other. We read in Revelation: “The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”¹

When the Babylonians attacked Judah and captured Jerusalem, they went well beyond what God intended them to do. They gave free rein to their cruelty and lust. They enjoyed so much what they were told to do that they incurred the wrath of God in doing what they did. The Hebrew text of v.11 reads literally: “Because you were glad, because you rejoiced, O destroyer of my heritage, because you are grown fat as a heifer at grass; and bellow as bulls ...” Isaiah had prophesied about those who had been God’s instrument of punishment and went beyond what they had been ordered to do. We read: “Does the ax raise itself above him who swings it, or the saw boast against him who uses it? As if a rod were to wield him who lifts it up, or a club brandish him who is not wood! Therefore, the Lord, the Lord Almighty, will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors; under his pomp a fire will be kindled like a blazing flame.”²

The Pulpit Commentary comments on v.12: “Your triumph shall be of short duration; disgrace follows closely upon its heels. ‘Your mother’ is a term for the nation regarded as a whole.” The commentary quotes the following verses to compare the same thought: “Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the Lord: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn.”³ “Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts. You stumble day and night, and the prophets stumble with you. So I will destroy your mother.”⁴

In describing the final condition of Babylon, Jeremiah uses the same expressions that he used earlier about Judah, Jerusalem and Edom: “an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds.”⁵

We read in Daniel how Babylon’s last king, Belshazzar, evinced his contempt for the God of Israel by using the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem for his bacchanalia. We read: “While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.”⁶ It was this act of derision that produced the handwriting on the wall and the destruction of the empire.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary states about the fall of Babylon: “Cyrus did not destroy Babylon when he captured it. Later in the Persian period the city revolted, and Darius Hystaspis captured it and destroyed its walls (514 B.C.), thus beginning its decay. The city continued to decline until well into the Christian era, when it ceased to exist. The desolate ruins remained for archaeologists to uncover in the nineteenth century ... Babylon was located in a fertile, irrigated farming land. With the destruction of the central authority, the system of irrigation canals became silted up, so that today the area resembles a desert.”

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1. Rev. 17:16-18
 2. Isa. 10:15,16
 3. Isa. 51:1
 4. Hos. 2:2; 4:5
 5. Jer. 18:16; 19:8; 49:17
 6. Dan. 5:2

In v.17 God regards Israel and Judah as one nation as they were originally before their breakup at the death of Solomon. The picture that portrays the tragedy is of one lamb killed by one lion, the bones of which are chewed up by another one. Assyria took the northern kingdom into captivity and Babylon the southern. At the time Jeremiah pronounced this prophecy, Israel's demise was ancient history and Judah had just been taken into captivity. The prediction is that God would do to Babylon what Babylon did to Assyria. How this defeat would come about is not told here. We only learn that the result will be that God will restore His sheep to their pasture. The story of how God Himself became a lamb that would take away the sin of the world is not mentioned. It was ultimately the Lamb that would conquer the lion.

Israel's new condition of full satisfaction will be based on the forgiveness of their guilt. The evidence of Israel's and Judah's sin will be so completely erased that no trace of it will ever be found. We glory in the fact that the Lamb of God did not only take away the sins of Israel, but of the whole world.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes about v.20: "Verse 20 begins with the unusual Messianic formula, indicating that this vision of pardon and blessing belongs to the days of the Messiah."

2. Judgment upon Babylon 50:21-32

21 "Attack the land of Merathaim and those who live in Pekod. Pursue, kill and completely destroy them," declares the Lord. "Do everything I have commanded you.

22 The noise of battle is in the land, the noise of great destruction!

23 How broken and shattered is the hammer of the whole earth! How desolate is Babylon among the nations!

24 I set a trap for you, O Babylon, and you were caught before you knew it; you were found and captured because you opposed the Lord.

25 The Lord has opened his arsenal and brought out the weapons of his wrath, for the Sovereign Lord Almighty has work to do in the land of the Babylonians.

26 Come against her from afar. Break open her granaries; pile her up like heaps of grain. Completely destroy her and leave her no remnant.

27 Kill all her young bulls; let them go down to the slaughter! Woe to them! For their day has come, the time for them to be punished.

28 Listen to the fugitives and refugees from Babylon declaring in Zion how the Lord our God has taken vengeance, vengeance for his temple.

29 "Summon archers against Babylon, all those who draw the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape. Repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done. For she has defied the Lord, the Holy One of Israel.

30 Therefore, her young men will fall in the streets; all her soldiers will be silenced in that day," declares the Lord.

31 "See, I am against you, O arrogant one," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty, "for your day has come, the time for you to be punished.

32 The arrogant one will stumble and fall and no one will help her up; I will kindle a fire in her towns that will consume all who are around her."

As R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations* explains: "Merathaim and Pekod, (literally 'Double Rebellion' and 'Visitation) are sarcastic wordplays on specific Babylonian localities. The former is the Mat Marratim district of southern Babylonia, while the latter is the name for Puqudu, an eastern Babylonian people (cf. Ezk. 23:23)."

The command to destroy Babylon is God's command to the Persian army that would defeat the Babylonians. It can also be interpreted as God speaking to "the prince of Persia," the territorial demonic

spirit identified in Daniel.¹ God not only allows Satan to carry out His punishment for sin, but He even orders him to do so. All disasters in this world originate with the Evil One with God's permission.

In v.13 God calls Babylon "the hammer of the whole earth." Isaiah had used similar language to describe Babylon's oppression: "On the day the Lord gives you relief from suffering and turmoil and cruel bondage, you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his fury has ended! The Lord has broken the rod of the wicked, the scepter of the rulers, which in anger struck down peoples with unceasing blows, and in fury subdued nations with relentless aggression."²

The Babylonians thought that their capital city was invincible. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states about the words "I set a trap for you, O Babylon, (v.24): "It was not by storm that Cyrus took the city. The Euphrates ran through it; he dug a channel for the river in another direction, to divert its stream; he waited for that time in which the inhabitants had delivered themselves up to debauchery: in the dead of the night he turned off the stream, and he and his army entered by the old channel, now void of its waters. This was the snare of which the prophet here speaks."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "The city ultimately fell in October 539 BC to Cyrus, who is said to have diverted the river Euphrates so that his troops could enter the strongly-defended city. Whereas the Cyrus Cylinder credited the easy victory to the guidance of Marduk, Jeremiah attributed Babylon's fall to the activities of Israel's God, who used the Medes and Persians to accomplish His punitive purposes."

V.26 seems to use the stores of food that were piled up inside the city as a symbol of the wealth of the city which would be utterly destroyed. It may have been literally true that the Babylonians had enough food stored up to survive a lengthy siege. It may also mean that Cyrus plundered the stores and carried them off for his own troops. But the way this verse represents it, the piled up grain was burned as were the buildings of the city. What Nebuchadnezzar had done to Jerusalem is done here to the city of Babylon.

It is generally believed that "young bulls" (v.27) stands for the young men of Babylon. As the abattoir in the city was down at the Euphrates River, "Let them go down" can be taken literally. It is not clear why they are singled out in this punishment. The fact that the young were particularly targeted from annihilation is clear in v.30.

The fugitives from Babylon who give report from the fall of the city in Zion must be Jews who managed to escape at the capture of Babylon. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: "Here Jeremiah sees the returning exiles jubilant over divine retribution. And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "Some Jews 'fleeing' from Babylon at its fall shall tell in Judea how God avenged the cause of Zion and her temple, with its sacred vessels, that had been so daringly profaned (Jer 52:13; Dan 1:2; Jer 50:2)."

God's anger against Babylon was particularly severe because of what Nebuchadnezzar had done to the temple in Jerusalem. It is true that the Judeans had been the first to desecrate the temple, first during the reign of Manasseh, and then even after Nebuchadnezzar had first come to Jerusalem and taken the temple treasures. God showed Ezekiel in a vision how the elders of Jerusalem were committing idolatry inside the temple.³ Ezekiel then saw how the glory of the Lord left the temple, leaving the building behind like an empty shell. The temple became like a dead body from which the spirit had departed.⁴ So in a way, it was the people of Jerusalem who desecrated the temple and who were responsible for its destruction. The question who destroyed the temple is similar to "who put Jesus on the cross?"

Yet, the Lord was particularly angry with Babylon because Nebuchadnezzar had defied Him by robbing the temple of her treasures and Belshazzar had used the gold and silver goblets for his orgies. Paul's

1. See Dan. 10:20.
2. Isa. 14:3-6
3. Ezek. Chapter 8
4. See Ezek. 9-11.

statement about the gentiles can be applied to the Babylonians: “Although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.”¹

3. Further condemnation of Babylon 50:33-46

33 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah as well. All their captors hold them fast, refusing to let them go.

34 Yet their Redeemer is strong; the Lord Almighty is his name. He will vigorously defend their cause so that he may bring rest to their land, but unrest to those who live in Babylon.

35 "A sword against the Babylonians!" declares the Lord — “against those who live in Babylon and against her officials and wise men!

36 A sword against her false prophets! They will become fools. A sword against her warriors! They will be filled with terror.

37 A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women. A sword against her treasures! They will be plundered.

38 A drought on her waters! They will dry up. For it is a land of idols, idols that will go mad with terror.

39 "So desert creatures and hyenas will live there, and there the owl will dwell. It will never again be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation.

40 As God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah along with their neighboring towns,” declares the Lord, "so no one will live there; no man will dwell in it.

41 "Look! An army is coming from the north; a great nation and many kings are being stirred up from the ends of the earth.

42 They are armed with bows and spears; they are cruel and without mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on their horses; they come like men in battle formation to attack you, O Daughter of Babylon.

43 The king of Babylon has heard reports about them, and his hands hang limp. Anguish has gripped him, pain like that of a woman in labor.

44 Like a lion coming up from Jordan’s thickets to a rich pastureland, I will chase Babylon from its land in an instant. Who is the chosen one I will appoint for this? Who is like me and who can challenge me? And what shepherd can stand against me?"

45 Therefore, hear what the Lord has planned against Babylon, what he has purposed against the land of the Babylonians: The young of the flock will be dragged away; he will completely destroy their pasture because of them.

46 At the sound of Babylon’s capture the earth will tremble; its cry will resound among the nations.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: “Tough the Babylonians will not release their captives voluntarily, those who conquer Babylon will do so. Jeremiah uses the concept of a near kinsman (MT *gôl*, redeemer, advocate), whose duty it is to avenge a murder and serve as protector (Lv. 25:25; Nu.35:21), to depict the nature and functions of the God of Israel.”

There is a linguistic connection between the word “sword” in vv. 35-37 and “drought” in v.38, which is lost in the translation. As Harrison explains: “In verse 38, the word *drought* (MT *höreb*) has the same consonants as the word ‘sword’ (*hrb*).”

In uttering this prophecy, Jeremiah must have hoped and believed that the captives of the northern kingdom in Assyria, together with the Judeans taken to Babylon, would be released during his lifetime. In the same way the Christians in the church of the first century believed that the return of Christ would occur within the next decades after Pentecost. Living so many centuries later, we know that events did not exactly

1. Rom. 1:21

take place as anticipated. This makes us understand that Jeremiah's prophecy covers more than a literal fulfillment. John, in Revelation, brings out the fact that most of Jeremiah's predictions about the fall of Babylon point to a spiritual fulfillment of which the few literal realizations in the age in which Jeremiah lived were a mere shadow of a greater reality.

The Hebrew text of v.38 reads literally: "A drought is upon her waters; and they shall be dried up: for it [is] the land of graven images and they are mad upon their idols." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* suggests that the drying up of the waters may refer to the deviation of the Euphrates by Cyrus.

The Hebrew word for "idol" is 'eymah, which literally means "fright," or "terror." We find it in the verse "From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death; I have suffered your *terrors* and am in despair."¹ There is an obvious play-on-words here.

"They are mad upon their idols" is variously translated as "And they are insane with their idols" (*New King James Version*); "idols that will go mad with terror," (*New International Version*), "and the people are madly in love with them" (*New Living Translation*). *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests the translation: "through Terrors they befool themselves." The commentary states: "'Terrors' is a synonym for the gods of the heathen, which inspired a feeling of awe rather than affection, unlike Jehovah as he revealed himself through the authors of the psalms and prophecies."

In describing the future conditions of Babylon, Jeremiah follows Isaiah's description: "Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also repose and find for themselves places of rest."² In comparing the fall of Babylon with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Jeremiah repeats what he earlier prophesied about Edom.³

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.41:46: "The warning about a northern nation addressed to Judah in 6:22-24 is now directed at Babylon, with appropriate changes ... The many kings are the allies of Persia (cf. 51:27f.) who are just as terrifying as the Assyrians were. Small wonder, then, that the Babylonian king is petrified with fear. Verses 44 to 46 repeat substantially the prediction against Edom in 48:19-21, but apply it to Babylon. Little Edom's cries would resound no further than the *Yam Sûp*, but Babylon's anguished howls would be heard throughout the Near East. Hearing them, people would recognize the Lord's handiwork."

4. Winds of change in Babylon 51:1-19

1 This is what the Lord says: "See, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon and the people of Leb Kamai.

2 I will send foreigners to Babylon to winnow her and to devastate her land; they will oppose her on every side in the day of her disaster.

3 Let not the archer string his bow, nor let him put on his armor. Do not spare her young men; completely destroy her army.

4 They will fall down slain in Babylon, fatally wounded in her streets.

5 For Israel and Judah have not been forsaken by their God, the Lord Almighty, though their land is full of guilt before the Holy One of Israel.

6 "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves.

7 Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.

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1. Ps. 88:15
 2. Isa. 34:14
 3. Jer. 49:18

8 *Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her! Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed.*

9 *"We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds."*

10 *"The Lord has vindicated us; come, let us tell in Zion what the Lord our God has done."*

11 *"Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields! The Lord has stirred up the kings of the Medes, because his purpose is to destroy Babylon. The Lord will take vengeance, vengeance for his temple."*

12 *Lift up a banner against the walls of Babylon! Reinforce the guard, station the watchmen, prepare an ambush! The Lord will carry out his purpose, his decree against the people of Babylon.*

13 *You who live by many waters and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off.*

14 *The Lord Almighty has sworn by himself: I will surely fill you with men, as with a swarm of locusts, and they will shout in triumph over you.*

15 *"He made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding."*

16 *When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar; he makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth. He sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses.*

17 *"Every man is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them."*

18 *They are worthless, the objects of mockery; when their judgment comes, they will perish.*

19 *He who is the Portion of Jacob is not like these, for he is the Maker of all things, including the tribe of his inheritance — the Lord Almighty is his name.*

The New International Version uses some interesting words in the opening verse of this chapter. The Hebrew word *ruwach*, literally means "wind," but it can also be used in the sense of "breath," or "spirit." We find it, for instance in the verse: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the *Spirit* of God was hovering over the waters."¹ And also in: "I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the *breath* of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."² And in: "But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a *wind* over the earth, and the waters receded."³ The heading of this section "Winds of change in Babylon" is therefore quite justifiable, as is the rendering "the spirit of a destroyer."

Another unusual feature is in the words "the people of Leb Kamai." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The Athbash or cabalistic mode of interpreting Hebrew words (by taking the letters in the inverse order of the alphabet, the last letter representing the first, and so on, Jer 25:26, 'Sheshach') would give the very word Chaldeans for 'in the midst of them that rise up against me' [leeb qaamaay] here; but the mystical method cannot be intended, as 'Babylon' is plainly so called in the immediately preceding parallel clause." *Barnes' Notes* adds: "This cipher was not necessarily invented by Jeremiah, or used for concealment. It was probably first devised either for political purposes or for trade, and was in time largely employed in the correspondence between the exiles at Babylon and their friends at home. Thus, words in common use like Sheshach (Jer 25:26) and Leb-kamai, would be known to everybody." *The New International Version* adds in a footnote: "Leb Kamai is a cryptogram for Chaldea, that is, Babylonia."

V.3 presents some difficulties that are hard to unravel. The Hebrew text reads literally: "Let the archer bend his bow against him that bends; and do not spare against him that lifts himself up in his

1. Gen. 1:2
2. Gen. 6:17
3. Gen. 8:1

brigandine: completely destroy all her young men.” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “There are two readings in the Hebrew Bible — one that given by the Authorized Version; the other, ‘Against him that bendeth (let) him that bendeth his bow (come).’ The difficulty, however, is in the first two words of the clause, which are the same in either reading. It would be much simpler to alter a single point, and render, ‘Let not the archer bend his bow; and let him not lift himself up in his coat of mail’ (for the old word ‘brigandine,’ see on ... Jeremiah 46:4); which might be explained of the Babylonians, on the analogy of ... Jeremiah 46:6, ‘Let him not bend his bow, for it will be useless;’ but then the second half of the verse hardly suits the first — the prohibitions seem clearly intended to run on in a connected order. On the other hand, the descriptions, ‘him that bendeth,’ and ‘him that lifteth himself up in his brigandine,’ seem hardly a natural way of putting ‘the Chaldean army.’” In the quoted reference of Jeremiah 46:4 *The New International Version* renders the word “brigandine,” “armor.”

The main point in this section seems to be that, although Babylon is about to fall and be destroyed, God stretches out His hand of protection over Israel and Judah and does not allow them to be carried away by the flood of destruction. The Hebrew text uses the word *alman* for “forsaken.” This is the only place in Scripture where this word is found. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The Hebrew is much more forcible, ‘is not widowed’ — alluding to the fundamental Old Testament idea of a mystic marriage between God and his people (comp ... Isaiah 50:1; 54:4-6; Hosea 2.)” The references in Isaiah 50 and 54 read respectively: “This is what the Lord says: ‘Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce with which I sent her away? Or to which of my creditors did I sell you? Because of your sins you were sold; because of your transgressions your mother was sent away.’” And: “Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your Maker is your husband — the Lord Almighty is his name — the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit — a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your God.”

There is a question as to whether “though their land is full of guilt” refers to Babylon or to Palestine. Some Bible scholars believe that the phrase should read “for their land is full of guilt.” The Hebrew word *kiy* allows for either meaning. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* gives the reading of Grotius: “and therefore their (the Chaldeans’) land has been filled with (the penal consequences of) their sin.”

The advice to flee from Babylon had already been given in the previous chapter.¹ As we observed, fleeing physically was not an option at that time. We therefore interpret this to mean a spiritually distancing oneself from the sin that brought Babylon to her knees. *The Biblical Illustrator* comments here with an excerpt of a lecture on *Pilgrim’s Progress* by G. H. Cheever: “Fleeing from the city of destruction: -- And now the trembling pilgrim, with fixed resolution, having a glimpse of the light and a definite direction, begins to run; it is unutterable relief to his perplexities to run towards Christ, though as yet he sees Him not. But now the world clamors after him, yea, the dearest ones in it try to stop him, but the fire in his conscience is stronger than they; he stops his ears and runs without looking behind, and stays not in all the plain, but runs as swiftly as his burden will let him, crying, ‘Life, life, eternal life!’”

The Apostle John, in Revelation, depicts Babylon as a prostitute who makes the kings of the earth drunk and kills the followers of Christ. We read: “She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries ... I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.”²

There seems to be a note of irony in the suggestion in v.8 to get balm for Babylon’s pain. Since Babylon’s illness is terminal, any medication would be useless. Bible scholars have argued about who is invited to lament Babylon’s fall. *Barnes’ Notes* suggests: “The persons addressed are the many inhabitants

1. See Jer. 50:8.

2. Rev. 17:4,6

of Babylon who were dragged from their homes to people its void places, and especially the Israelites. They have dwelt there long enough to feel pity for her, when they contrast her past magnificence with her terrible fall.” In Revelation, the kings, the merchants of the earth and the sea captains do the lamenting, since the fall of Babylon affects them personally.¹ Since the Holy Spirit is His own interpreter, we believe the answer to the question is given here.

V.9 could also apply to those who were hit financially by Babylon’s fall. They would have done everything in their power to save the system that enriched them. It seems to make more sense, however, to put the words “we would have healed Babylon” in the mouth of pious Jews, such as Daniel. The people of Israel, as the guardians of God’s revelation, did have what it takes to heal sin and corruption in this world. They had the Old Testament equivalent to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the power for salvation. But Babylon, in her prosperity, did not think she needed to be saved. In connection with the following verse, Israel seems to be the most logical one to provide for Babylon what could have saved her.

“The Lord has vindicated us” (v.10) is the translation of the Hebrew: “The Lord has brought forth our righteousness.” The Hebrew word used is *tsedaqah*, which means “rightness,” or “justice.” The first time this word is used in Scripture is in the verse: “Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.”²

This justification by faith acquires new meaning if we realize that Jeremiah spoke these words at least half a century before they would be fulfilled. Babylon had just risen to the top of powerful nations. People were still being taken into captivity and there must have been an overwhelming spirit of gloom and despair among all. To speak at that point of world history about the victory of good over evil, while evil seemed to have the upperhand, must have sounded to most people like the epitome of unrealism. Jeremiah’s faith in God’s righteousness made him understand how unrighteousness was doomed to fail. In this prophecy he stands in the darkness of Christ’s death on the cross of Calvary, proclaiming the dawn of His resurrection.

The topic of vv.11-14 is God’s revenge for the destruction of His temple by the Babylonians. This reminds us of Jesus’ statement at the time He cleansed the temple in Jerusalem from the mercantile activities that took place in its courts: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” To which John adds: “But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”³ The resurrection of Jesus Christ was God’s vengeance upon Satan for what he had done to the place of God’s revelation on earth. What happened at Calvary at the fullness of time had been foreshadowed several times throughout world history. Satan’s efforts to thwart God’s revelation occurred repeatedly before the cross and it keeps on repeating itself up to the present. The devil is still selling his cattle in the church; he still has tables for money changers and still shows people how to make financial profit in places meant for prayer and worship. That still makes him the object of God’s vengeance.

The Pulpit Commentary observes about the words “the kings of the Medes”: “The prophet speaks of the Medes and not the Persians (comp. ... Isaiah 13:17). The reason, probably, is twofold: (1) that the name *Madai* became known to the Jews at an earlier period than *Paras*, ‘Persia;’ and (2) that the generals of Cyrus were apparently Medes ... The new Cyrus inscription throws light on the latter circumstance.”

Bible scholars have questioned the validity of the placement of vv.15-19, which is a word-for-word quotation of a previous section.⁴ It is not so much that Jeremiah would not have the right to quote himself, but it is felt that the quotation distracts from the flow of thought in this chapter. That point could be argued about, but it seems to me that, in view of the desperate circumstances in which the Jewish captives found

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1. Rev. 18:9-20
 2. Gen. 15:6
 3. John 2:19,21
 4. See Jer. 10:12-16.

themselves, and in the light of the predicted victory set forth before them, which seemed to be more a wish than a realistic possibility, it is good to realize who God is and what He is able to accomplish. A clear picture of who we serve will make us understand that nothing is impossible with God. And that is the message Jeremiah sends in this quotation.

In speaking these words, Jeremiah also copied Isaiah who spoke in a similar vein about the same subject, saying: “‘To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?’ says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God’? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.”¹ In a way Israel’s history began when Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked to the heavens and believed God’s promise.²

When the Babylonians saw how their idols had let them down, they took this as a personal failure. After all, the idol statues were the products of their own hands. It was human power that had failed in this confrontation with the power of God. A. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on these verses: “The quotation shows the impotence of the Babylonian gods in an emergency, and the consequent certainty of divine judgment upon Babylon ... A thorough-going condemnation of pagan idols was a prominent feature of pre-exilic prophecy, and was reiterated in the New Testament (cf. I Cor. 5:10; 6:9; 8:4; 10:7, etc.)”

5. An agent of judgment is to be judged 51:20-26

20 "You are my war club, my weapon for battle — with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms,

21 with you I shatter horse and rider, with you I shatter chariot and driver,

22 with you I shatter man and woman, with you I shatter old man and youth, with you I shatter young man and maiden,

23 with you I shatter shepherd and flock, with you I shatter farmer and oxen, with you I shatter governors and officials.

24 "Before your eyes I will repay Babylon and all who live in Babylonia for all the wrong they have done in Zion," declares the Lord.

25 "I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth," declares the Lord. "I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.

26 No rock will be taken from you for a cornerstone, nor any stone for a foundation, for you will be desolate forever," declares the Lord.

Vv.20-23 are obviously addressed to Cyrus, whom God calls here His “war club.” The Hebrew word used is *mappets*, which *The King James Version* renders “battle ax.” This is the only place in Scripture where this word occurs. Jeremiah does not use Cyrus’ name like Isaiah did in a similar prophecy.³

The Pulpit Commentary questions the assumption that Cyrus is the one addressed here. We read: “The commentators are divided, some inclining to Babylon, (1) because Babylon was the last person addressed (see ver. 14), and (2) because a similar title was given to Babylon in ... Jeremiah 50:23: others to Israel, on the ground that the tenses are the same throughout the passage (vers. 20-24). The latter view is probably the best. How could Babylon be said to shatter her own ‘governors’ and ‘viceroys’ (for the prophet

1. Isa. 40:25-28
2. See Gen. 15:1-6.
3. Isa. 44:28; 45:1,13

deliberately chooses the Babylonian official names)? The argument from the context is not very weighty; for it is clear that the connection of the parts of this prophecy is very loose. We may assume, then, that ver. 20 begins a fresh paragraph, standing quite apart from that which precedes. The objection of Graf and Keil, is that Israel could not himself be styled a “mace,” it being Israel’s destiny to be delivered by others. But is not a very similar statement made of Israel in ... Isaiah 41:15; ... Psalm 149:7-9?” Cyrus still seems to be the most logical option in my opinion.

V.24 goes beyond vengeance for the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem as in v.11. Here God promises to punish Babylon for everything she did to the Judeans, although they were God’s instrument of punishment for Judah’s sin.

In vv. 25 and 26 God addresses the power behind the Babylonian Empire. Satan is compared to a mountain of destruction. As such we see him later, during the rebuilding of the temple at the return of captivity. The prophet Zechariah addresses him there with: “What are you, O mighty mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become level ground. Then he will bring out the capstone to shouts of ‘God bless it! God bless it!’”¹

At the same time, of course, Babylon is the instrument Satan used for the exercise of his terror. She also is comprised in the image of the destroying mountain, depicted here as a volcano. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “Under this beautiful and most expressive metaphor, the prophet shows the nature of the Babylonian government; setting the nations on fire, deluging and destroying them by its troops, till at last, exhausted, it tumbles down, is extinguished, and leaves nothing as a basis to erect a new form of government on; but is altogether useless, like the cooled lava, which is, properly speaking, fit for no human purpose.” And *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes about the phrase “O destroying mountain”: - called so, not from its position, for it lay low in the "plain in the land of Shinar," where the original tower of Babel was built (Jer 51:13; Gen 11:2,9), but from its eminence above other nations, many of which it had "destroyed;" also because of its lofty palaces, towers, hanging gardens resting on arches, and walls 50 royal cubits broad and 200 royal cubits high.

6. The nations ally against Babylon 51:27-33

27 "Lift up a banner in the land! Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations for battle against her; summon against her these kingdoms: Ararat, Minni and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander against her; send up horses like a swarm of locusts.

28 Prepare the nations for battle against her — the kings of the Medes, their governors and all their officials, and all the countries they rule.

29 The land trembles and writhes, for the Lord’s purposes against Babylon stand — to lay waste the land of Babylon so that no one will live there.

30 Babylon’s warriors have stopped fighting; they remain in their strongholds. Their strength is exhausted; they have become like women. Her dwellings are set on fire; the bars of her gates are broken.

31 One courier follows another and messenger follows messenger to announce to the king of Babylon that his entire city is captured,

32 the river crossings seized, the marshes set on fire, and the soldiers terrified."

33 This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "The Daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time it is trampled; the time to harvest her will soon come."

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on these verses: “Other peoples are now to be used by God to punish wicked Babylon. *Ararat* was ancient Urartu, located north-west of Lake Van in Armenia, and prominent in Assyrian inscriptions. *Minni*, the Mannai of Assyrian texts, was also near Lake Van, while *Ashkenaz*, the cuneiform *Aš-ku-za*, was an ally of the Mannai in their seventh-century revolt

1. Zech. 4:7

against Assyria. The reference to *bristling locusts* (27) is apparently to a highly destructive stage of locust life during which the wings are encased on the back in rough horny covers. The much vaunted courier systems of the Babylonians (31) now announces ruin in breathless haste. The marshes (32) were apparently burned to prevent refugees from hiding there and thus escaping destruction. Babylon's enemies will reap the harvest of devastation, while she herself will be destroyed in the process (cf. Is. 17:5; Joel 4:13)."

Jeremiah does not specify in which land the banner must be lifted up. We assume it is Israel that issues the call to arms to the other nations. The Hebrew word rendered "prepare" in vv.27 and 28 is *qadash*, which literally means "make or pronounce clean ceremonially or morally." The first time it is used in Scripture is in the verse: "And God blessed the seventh day and *made it holy*, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done."¹ We also find it in the verse: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal.'"² The war the nations are called to participate in is a holy war, a war against evil.

There can be little doubt as to what country can be meant in v.29. About the fact that the "Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting" (v.30) *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The mighty men of Babylon have forborne to fight - for the city was not taken by force of arms, but by stratagem, according to the counsel given to Cyrus by two eunuchs of Belshazzar, who deserted." And on the confusion of the couriers, who run to and fro, described in v.31, the same commentary states: "One post - one courier after another shall announce the capture of the city. The couriers dispatched from the walls where Cyrus enters shall 'meet' those sent by the king. Their confused running to and fro would result from the sudden panic at the entrance of Cyrus into the city, which he had so long besieged ineffectually: the Babylonians had laughed at his attempts, and were feasting at the time without fear. Taken at one end - which was not known for a long time to the king and his courtiers feasting in the middle of the city: so great was its extent that, when the city was already three days in the enemy's hands, the fact was not known in some parts of the city (Aristotle, 'Polemics,' iii. 2)."

Cyrus took the city in 539 B.C. Jeremiah predicted this event approximately 70 years before it happened. Aristotle, who lived about a century later (384-322 B.C.), confirmed the accuracy of this, by a then almost 200-year-old prophecy.

The comparison of the daughter of Babylon to a threshing floor reminds us of the picture the Apostle John uses in Revelation of God's harvest of the earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ will judge the nations of this world at the last day in world history. We read John's description of the event: "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one 'like a son of man' with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested."³ The main feature in the scene Jeremiah describes is the pain of Babylon being crushed by the sledges that runs over the ears of wheat, separating the kernel from the chaff. The positive aspect in this negative picture of war and destruction is that God will end up with a wheat harvest, and also a harvest of grapes, as is clear from the next scene John describes.⁴ At the end of world history there will be bread and wine.

7. Judah's complaint against Babylon 51:34-40

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1. Gen. 2:3
 2. Ex. 13:1,2
 3. Rev. 14:14-16
 4. See Rev. 14:17-20.

34 "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured us, he has thrown us into confusion, he has made us an empty jar. Like a serpent he has swallowed us and filled his stomach with our delicacies, and then has spewed us out.

35 May the violence done to our flesh be upon Babylon," say the inhabitants of Zion. "May our blood be on those who live in Babylonia," says Jerusalem.

36 Therefore, this is what the Lord says: "See, I will defend your cause and avenge you; I will dry up her sea and make her springs dry.

37 Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives.

38 Her people all roar like young lions, they growl like lion cubs.

39 But while they are aroused, I will set out a feast for them and make them drunk, so that they shout with laughter — then sleep forever and not awake," declares the Lord.

40 "I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams and goats.

The Hebrew of v.34 reads literally: "Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has swallowed me up, like a dragon he has filled his belly with my delicacies, he has cast me out." "Dragon" is the translation of the Hebrew word *tannuwr*, which literally means "a fire-pot," or "a furnace." The first time that word is used in Scripture is in the verse "So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good."¹ We also find it in the verse "When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."² And in "Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras."³ In Jeremiah's text the emphasis seems to be on the poison. There is probably a reference here to a mythological creature. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Comparing this with ver. 44, it is difficult not to see an allusion to the Babylonian myth of the Serpent, who in the fight with Marduk (Meredach) devoured the tempest, which rent asunder her belly."

Jeremiah gives voice to Judah's prayer for vengeance upon Babylon. *The New International Version*, in a footnote gives the alternate reading for "May the violence done to our flesh be upon Babylon," as "done to us and to our children." What is meant here is described in one of the psalms: "O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us — he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks."⁴

Vv.36-44 give God's answer to the above prayer. The Hebrew of v.36 reads literally: "Therefore, I will plead your cause." This gives to the picture of the New Testament "counselor," the Holy Spirit, a new character of ministry, as one who avenges wrong.

The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary comments on the words "I will dry up her sea and make her springs dry": "He will also dry up the sea of Babylon, and make her spring dry up. Many expositors understand these latter words metaphorically, as referring to the sea of nations surging in Babylon (vv. 42, 55), and view the treasures and riches as the fountain from which the sea of nations sprang up ... but the context demands a literal interpretation, inasmuch as in v. 37 the subject treated of is the laying waste of the country. The sea of Babylon is the Euphrates, with its canals, lakes, and marshes, i.e., the abundance of water to which Babylonia owed its fertility, and the city its influence as the centre of the then known world. Isaiah (Isa 21:1) accordingly calls Babylon, emblematically, the desert of the sea, inasmuch as the region in

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1. Gen. 1:21
 2. Ex. 7:9
 3. Deut. 32:33
 4. Ps. 137:8,9

which Babylon stands is a plain, broken in such a manner by the Euphrates, as well as by marshes and lakes, as that the city, so to speak, swims in the sea The source of the spring of the sea is the Euphrates, and the drying up of this spring is not to be understood literally of the drying up of the Euphrates, but signifies a drying up of the springs of water that fertilize the country.”

About God’s promise that He will make the people of Babylon drunk, as they are being invaded by the enemy, *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “It was on the night of a feast day, while their hearts were heated with wine and revelry, that Babylon was taken; see Dan 5:1-3. This feast was held in honor of the goddess Sheshach, (or perhaps of Bel,) who is mentioned, Jer 51:41, as being taken with her worshippers. As it was in the night the city was taken, many had retired to rest, and never awoke; slain in their beds, they slept a perpetual sleep.”

8. God brings destruction upon Babylon 51:41-58

41 "How Sheshach will be captured, the boast of the whole earth seized! What a horror Babylon will be among the nations!

42 The sea will rise over Babylon; its roaring waves will cover her.

43 Her towns will be desolate, a dry and desert land, a land where no one lives, through which no man travels.

44 I will punish Bel in Babylon and make him spew out what he has swallowed. The nations will no longer stream to him. And the wall of Babylon will fall.

45 "Come out of her, my people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the Lord.

46 Do not lose heart or be afraid when rumors are heard in the land; one rumor comes this year, another the next, rumors of violence in the land and of ruler against ruler.

47 For the time will surely come when I will punish the idols of Babylon; her whole land will be disgraced and her slain will all lie fallen within her.

48 Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon, for out of the north destroyers will attack her," declares the Lord.

49 "Babylon must fall because of Israel’s slain, just as the slain in all the earth have fallen because of Babylon.

50 You who have escaped the sword, leave and do not linger! Remember the Lord in a distant land, and think on Jerusalem."

51 "We are disgraced, for we have been insulted and shame covers our faces, because foreigners have entered the holy places of the Lord’s house."

52 "But days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will punish her idols, and throughout her land the wounded will groan.

53 Even if Babylon reaches the sky and fortifies her lofty stronghold, I will send destroyers against her," declares the Lord.

54 "The sound of a cry comes from Babylon, the sound of great destruction from the land of the Babylonians.

55 The Lord will destroy Babylon; he will silence her noisy din. Waves [of enemies] will rage like great waters; the roar of their voices will resound.

56 A destroyer will come against Babylon; her warriors will be captured, and their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution; he will repay in full.

57 I will make her officials and wise men drunk, her governors, officers and warriors as well; they will sleep forever and not awake," declares the King, whose name is the Lord Almighty.

58 This is what the Lord Almighty says: "Babylon’s thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire; the peoples exhaust themselves for nothing, the nations’ labor is only fuel for the flames."

Not every Bible scholar agrees with Clarke's view that Sheshach stands for an idol. A footnote in *The New International Version*, for instance, states: "Sheshach is a cryptogram for Babylon." *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* explains: "This is supposed to be a symbolical name for Babel, or Babylon (Jer 25:26; 51:41). It is thought by some critics to be a cabalistic plan called 'Athbash.' The letters of the alphabet were numbered both in their correct and reverse orders. When the cipher of a name was devised, its consonants were replaced by the identical numbers in the reverse numbering. Since 'B' is the second letter of the Heb. alphabet and 'S' or 'Sh' the second from the end, and 'L' the twelfth from the beginning and 'K' the twelfth from the end, the cipher for Babel was Sheshak."

There is no agreement either about the meaning of the phrase "The sea will rise over Babylon; its roaring waves will cover her." Some believe that this refers to the flooding of the land by the Euphrates River. But the next verse that depicts the land as "a dry and desert land" strongly suggests that no physical flooding by water is intended. V.55 – "Waves [of enemies] will rage like great waters; the roar of their voices will resound" ought to explain to satisfaction what the image represents.

It is good to look at this chapter by placing it next to Isaiah's prophecy about the prince of Babylon, who turns out to be Lucifer, who fell from heaven. We read: "The grave below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you — all those who were leaders in the world; it makes them rise from their thrones — all those who were kings over the nations. They will all respond, they will say to you, 'You also have become weak, as we are; you have become like us.' All your pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps; maggots are spread out beneath you and worms cover you. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: 'Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?'"¹ Judgment over Babylon, both in the Old and New Testament is ultimately judgment over the prince of this world. The final judgment, as portrayed in Revelation, makes this clear.

The advice to flee from Babylon runs as a purple thread throughout the Bible. For those who had been taken into captivity, this was not a physical option. The meaning is a spiritual detachment from the values that were adhered to in Babylon. The Apostle John probably explains best what fleeing from Babylon means: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."² Fleeing Babylon means choosing that which is eternal over that which is temporal and perishable.

That the fall of Babylon prophesied here stands for more than Cyrus' capture of the city is clear from the universal rejoicing over her fall. V.48 states: "Then heaven and earth and all that is in them will shout for joy over Babylon."

V.46 makes us think of Jesus' warning regarding the time that precedes His second coming: "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains."³

The Hebrew text of v.49 reads literally: "As the slain of Israel has caused Babylon to fall, so Babylon shall fall at the slain of all the earth." Bible scholars admit that this verse is very difficult to translate. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states: "Verse 49 can be rendered variously. By adding the preposition *l*^c ('for') to 'the slain of Israel' (on the pattern of 'for Babylon' in the next line), the verse begins, *Even Babylon must fall for Israel's slain, just as the whole earth's slain have fallen for*

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1. Isa. 14:9-11,16,17
 2. I John 2:15-17
 3. Matt. 24:6-8

Babylon. If MT is elliptical, the text could be rendered, *As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon the whole earth's slain shall fall*, as adopted by RV. The RV margin construes 'the slain of Israel' as a vocative, and translates, 'Both Babylon is to fall, o ye slain of Israel, and at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land.'" *The New Living Translation* reads the verse: "Just as Babylon killed the people of Israel and others throughout the world, so must her people be killed."

The most interesting feature of the message the verse proclaims is the connection between Israel's victim of Babylon's cruelty and the victims of the rest of the world. This correlation between God's dealing with Israel and the rest of the world is also evinced in Moses' statement in Deuteronomy: "When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel."¹ As the people among whom God revealed Himself for the benefit of the whole world, Israel had been Babylon's prime target. The principle of representation is exemplified in full in the person of Jesus Christ, who, as the Lamb of God, carried away the sin of the world.

V.50 contains another call to Israel for spiritual separation from Babylon and her sin. This is connected to a reminder of Jerusalem, the place of God's revelation. Daniel took this admonition literally. We read: "Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before."² In Daniel's day, the place of God's revelation was in ruin. The destroyed temple suggested the death of God, foreshadowing of the death of Jesus on the cross. For us a reminder of Jerusalem is, in the words of the Apostle Paul: "nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified."³

V.51 describes the reaction of the Jewish captives to the reminder of Jerusalem in the previous verse. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* quotes Calvin, who states: "The prophet anticipates the Jews' reply: I know you will say in despair, 'We are confounded,' etc. 'Wherefore (God saith to you), behold, the days come that I will do judgment upon her (Babylon's) graven images.'"

There are two sides to the emotions described in this verse. The destruction of the temple was obviously proof of the fact that the Babylonians considered YHWH to be merely a local deity of Israel. Although there must have been in Babylon's mythology creation stories and a reference to a Creator, they did not identify the God of Israel with their own ancient beliefs. If they did, their act was a direct rebellion. On the other hand, the fact that God had chosen Israel as His bridehead on earth and Jerusalem as the place of His revelation, had given the Jews reasons for national pride, which had outgrown permissible proportions. Instead of recognizing God's election as unmerited grace, they believed that they had earned their position in the world. The destruction of the temple, therefore, was a devastating insult to their national pride.

V.51 does not even mention the destruction of the temple or the disappearance of the ark. The words "foreigners have entered the holy places of the Lord's house" are most telling. They reveal the assumption that only Jews had the right of fellowship with God. It shows disregard for Isaiah's prophecy: "And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him, to love the name of the Lord, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant — these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."⁴

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1. Deut. 32:8
 2. Dan. 6:10
 3. I Cor. 2:2
 4. Isa. 56:6,7

God also considered the destruction of the temple a personal insult. As with the Egyptians, so with the Babylonians, the matter went well beyond what human beings did to each other. At the exodus, God said to the people: “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the Lord.”¹ The ruins of the temple were an insult to God by the gods of Babylon, that is by Satan’s minions.

The phrase “Even if Babylon reaches the sky” takes us back to the original Babylon, where the people had said: “Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.”² But here God would do more than merely confusing their language.

The cry that comes from Babylon is probably not the shriek of panic but the noise of war. Yet, when Cyrus captured the city, he did not destroy it. A Persian inscription states that Cyrus honored the idols of Babylon. That text reads: “When I entered Babylon peacefully, Marduk, their great lord, made the great heart of the Babylonians sympathetic toward me, while I was daily careful to honor him.”³ This is furthermore proof that God looked beyond the political events to the spiritual struggle between light and darkness of which the destruction of Babylon would be symbolic. Even the prediction in v.57 refers to more than to the orgy of Belshazzar, which Daniel describes.⁴ The king and his officials may have been asleep when the city was taken, but they certainly woke up in time to discover that the impossible had occurred.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, states about the wall of Babylon: “Under Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon was surrounded with a double wall of defensive fortifications which, according to Herodotus ... enclosed an area of 200 square miles.”

8. The charge of Jeremiah to Seraiah 51:59-64

59 This is the message Jeremiah gave to the staff officer Seraiah son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon with Zedekiah king of Judah in the fourth year of his reign.

60 Jeremiah had written on a scroll about all the disasters that would come upon Babylon — all that had been recorded concerning Babylon.

61 He said to Seraiah, "When you get to Babylon, see that you read all these words aloud.

62 Then say, 'O Lord, you have said you will destroy this place, so that neither man nor animal will live in it; it will be desolate forever.'

63 When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates.

64 Then say, 'So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall.'" The words of Jeremiah end here.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, notes about this section: “This commission can be dated 594/3 BC, according to v.59. Seraiah ben Neriah ben Mahseiah would thus be the brother of Baruch (cf. 32:12). He was the officer in charge of bivouac arrangements (RSV, NEB quartermaster) when the party stopped to camp. He was instructed to take the oracle predicting the destruction of Babylon and read it aloud to the exiles once arrived there. This done (63), the sinking of the oracle in the Euphrates symbolized that Babylon, like the scroll, would never rise again.”

This did not happen when the final destruction of Jerusalem took place and Zedekiah was taken captive and blinded, which took place in 586 B.C. There are no other records which state that Zedekiah went

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1. Ex. 12:12
 2. Gen. 11:4
 3. According to the Dutch *Bijbelse Encyclopedie*.
 4. Dan. 5

to Babylon in the fourth year of his eleven-year-long reign. So this object lesson was for the encouragement of the first group that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. when Jehoiachin was taken prisoner and Daniel and friends were deported.

The Apostle John, in Revelation, puts Jeremiah's prophecy in the context of God's final judgment over sin and evil. We read: "Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: 'With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.'"¹ Things on earth are a reflection of realities in heaven.

C. Historical Appendix 52:1-34

1 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. His mother's name was Hamutal daughter of Jeremiah; she was from Libnah.

2 He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, just as Jehoiakim had done.

3 It was because of the Lord's anger that all this happened to Jerusalem and Judah, and in the end he thrust them from his presence. Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

4 So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. They camped outside the city and built siege works all around it.

5 The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.

6 By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat.

7 Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled. They left the city at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah,

8 but the Babylonian army pursued King Zedekiah and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered,

9 and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where he pronounced sentence on him.

10 There at Riblah the king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes; he also killed all the officials of Judah.

11 Then he put out Zedekiah's eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon, where he put him in prison till the day of his death.

12 On the tenth day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, who served the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem.

13 He set fire to the temple of the Lord, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down.

14 The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem.

15 Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest people and those who remained in the city, along with the rest of the craftsmen and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon.

16 But Nebuzaradan left behind the rest of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields.

17 The Babylonians broke up the bronze pillars, the movable stands and the bronze Sea that were at the temple of the Lord and they carried all the bronze to Babylon.

18 They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes and all the bronze articles used in the temple service.

1. Rev. 18:21

19 *The commander of the imperial guard took away the basins, censers, sprinkling bowls, pots, lampstands, dishes and bowls used for drink offerings — all that were made of pure gold or silver.*

20 *The bronze from the two pillars, the Sea and the twelve bronze bulls under it, and the movable stands, which King Solomon had made for the temple of the Lord, was more than could be weighed.*

21 *Each of the pillars was eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits in circumference; each was four fingers thick, and hollow.*

22 *The bronze capital on top of the one pillar was five cubits high and was decorated with a network and pomegranates of bronze all around. The other pillar, with its pomegranates, was similar.*

23 *There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; the total number of pomegranates above the surrounding network was a hundred.*

24 *The commander of the guard took as prisoners Seraiah the chief priest, Zephaniah the priest next in rank and the three doorkeepers.*

25 *Of those still in the city, he took the officer in charge of the fighting men, and seven royal advisers. He also took the secretary who was chief officer in charge of conscripting the people of the land and sixty of his men who were found in the city.*

26 *Nebuzaradan the commander took them all and brought them to the king of Babylon at Riblah.*

27 *There at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, the king had them executed. So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.*

28 *This is the number of the people Nebuchadnezzar carried into exile: in the seventh year, 3,023 Jews;*

29 *in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth year, 832 people from Jerusalem;*

30 *in his twenty-third year, 745 Jews taken into exile by Nebuzaradan the commander of the imperial guard. There were 4,600 people in all.*

31 *In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the year Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon, he released Jehoiachin king of Judah and freed him from prison on the twenty-fifth day of the twelfth month.*

32 *He spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat of honor higher than those of the other kings who were with him in Babylon.*

33 *So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes and for the rest of his life ate regularly at the king's table.*

34 *Day by day the king of Babylon gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance as long as he lived, till the day of his death.*

Since the previous chapter ends with the phrase “The words of Jeremiah end here” it is a safe assumption that chapter 52 is not from the hand of Jeremiah. Some Bible scholars suggest that Ezra may have been the author. That assumption is as difficult to prove or disprove as the authorship of Hebrews. *Barnes' Notes* observes: “The last words of the foregoing chapter affirm that Jeremiah was not the author, and the view adopted by most commentators is, that this chapter is taken from the 2nd Book of Kings, but that the person who added it here had access to other valuable documents, and made several modifications in it, the principal being the substitution of the account of those led captive by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 52:28-30).” Most of the material in this chapter is found in II Kings 24:18-25:30. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, writes: “The material was perhaps placed here to show how Jeremiah's prophecies had been fulfilled. Some difference of content exist when compare with chapter 39, including a description of cultic equipment removed from the Temple, and a surprising lack of mention of Nebuchadnezzar's instructions for the protection of Jeremiah.”

The Pulpit Commentary comments: “The contents of this chapter prove that it is not an independent narrative, but the concluding part of a history of the kings of Judah. It agrees almost word for word with ... 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, from which we are justified in inferring that it is taken from the historical work which the editor of the Books of Kings closely followed. It is most improbable that Jeremiah was the author. Would the prophet have contented himself with the meager statement that Zedekiah ‘did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord’ (ver. 2), or with such a summary description of the siege of Jerusalem? Apparently

the editor who attached ch. 52. as an appendix to the Book of Jeremiah omitted the account of Gedaliah (preserved in ... 2 Kings 25:22-26) because a fuller narrative had been already given in ch. 40-42. Apparently, too, either the same or some later editor inserted vers. 28-30 (not found in the Septuagint) from another source; the passage differs in several respects from 2 Kings 24. The text of ch. 52. seems to be a nearer approach to the original document than that of ... 2 Kings 24:18-25:30.”

After outlining the ascension of Zedekiah to the throne of Judah, the chapter goes into detail about the siege of Jerusalem and the subsequent fall of the city. Zedekiah reigned from 597 to 586 B.C. He was put on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar, who changed his Jewish name from Mattaniah, meaning “gift of YHWH,” to Zedekiah, “YHWH my righteousness.” Nebuchadnezzar had made Zedekiah swear an oath of allegiance by the Name of YHWH,¹ which oath he broke when he rebelled against Babylon.

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes about vv.4-11: “The siege began in early January of 588 BC, the *ninth year* being 589/8 BC. The *fourth month* of verse 6 was July 587 BC, the time being counted from the beginning of the Babylonian New Year (March/April). The imprisonment of Zedekiah was not mentioned in 2 Kings 25:7.”

Ezekiel had prophesied what would happen to Zedekiah when he broke his oath, made in the Name of the God of Israel, by sending envoys to Egypt to ask for help against Nebuchadnezzar. Under the image of an eagle plucking a clipping from the top of a cedar, which he transplanted from Israel to Babylon, the prophet foretold the events described in this chapter.² Ezekiel’s prophecy ends with the words: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will take a shoot from the very top of a cedar and plant it; I will break off a tender sprig from its topmost shoots and plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain heights of Israel I will plant it; it will produce branches and bear fruit and become a splendid cedar. Birds of every kind will nest in it; they will find shelter in the shade of its branches. All the trees of the field will know that I the Lord bring down the tall tree and make the low tree grow tall. I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken, and I will do it.”³ Those last words seem to go beyond the prediction of a return from captivity by the remnant of Israel. They refer to the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus’ parable about the mustard seed which becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches⁴ shows enough similarity to Ezekiel’s allegory to allow for this interpretation.

Matthew Henry’s Commentary comments on the flight, capture and sentence of Zedekiah: “One cannot think of it without the utmost vexation and regret that a king, a king of Judah, a king of the house of David, should be arraigned as a criminal at the bar of this heathen king. But he humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet; therefore God thus humbled him. Pursuant to the sentence passed upon him by the haughty conqueror, his sons were slain before his eyes, and all the princes of Judah (v. 10); then his eyes were put out, and he was bound in chains, carried in triumph to Babylon; perhaps they made sport with him, as they did with Samson when his eyes were put out; however, he was condemned to perpetual imprisonment, wearing out the remainder of his life (I cannot say his days, for he saw day no more) in darkness and misery. He was kept in prison till the day of his death, but had some honor done him at his funeral, ch. 34:5. Jeremiah had often told him what it would come to, but he would not take warning when he might have prevented it.”

The Jews in captivity and the remnant that returned commemorated the fall of the Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple with a quadruple fast. Zechariah mentions this in a prophecy that foretold the restoration of the true Israel and the messianic witness that God’s chosen people would have in this world.

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1. II Chron. 36:13
 2. See Ezek. 17.
 3. Ezek. 17:22-24
 4. Matt. 13:31,32

We read: “Again the word of the Lord Almighty came to me. This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months will become joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.’ This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Many peoples and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come, and the inhabitants of one city will go to another and say, ‘Let us go at once to entreat the Lord and seek the Lord Almighty. I myself am going.’ And many peoples and powerful nations will come to Jerusalem to seek the Lord Almighty and to entreat him.’ This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, ‘Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.’”¹

Jeremiah had earlier predicted that the bronze pillars, named Jakin, meaning “He establishes,” and Boaz, “in Him is strength,” that stood in front of the temple, and the other heavy articles, would be carried off to Babylon. We read: “Then I said to the priests and all these people, ‘This is what the Lord says: Do not listen to the prophets who say, ‘Very soon now the articles from the Lord’s house will be brought back from Babylon.’ They are prophesying lies to you. Do not listen to them. Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live. Why should this city become a ruin? If they are prophets and have the word of the Lord, let them plead with the Lord Almighty that the furnishings remaining in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem not be taken to Babylon. For this is what the Lord Almighty says about the pillars, the Sea, the movable stands and the other furnishings that are left in this city, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon did not take away when he carried Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon, along with all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem — yes, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says about the things that are left in the house of the Lord and in the palace of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem: ‘They will be taken to Babylon and there they will remain until the day I come for them,’ declares the Lord. ‘Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place.’”²

This never happened in a physical sense. Ezra reports that 5,400 articles of gold and of silver that belonged to the temple were returned by order of Cyrus, but the bronze of the pillars, the sea and other heavy articles is not mentioned.³ The author of Hebrews describes the inventory of the first room of the tabernacle, indicating that the presence of that room constituted a barrier that kept people from entering the Holy of Holies, the place of fellowship with God. He writes: “The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings — external regulations applying until the time of the new order.”⁴ We may apply this also to the items that stood in front of the temple of Solomon and say that these pieces belonged to the old order. What God restored was the new order in Jesus Christ.

Vv.24-27 report the imprisonment and execution of the high priest of the temple and his assistance, the army officers, seven cabinet ministers, the secretary of defense and sixty recruits. They were all taken to Riblah, where Nebuchadnezzar had them executed. R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, observes that “*Seraiah* was the grandson of Hilkiah, the High Priest under Josiah, who could trace his descent from Aaron (cf. I Ch. 6:13–15, EVV), while *Zephaniah* was possibly the person named in 29:24 – 32; 37:3).”

There is a discrepancy with the record of Second Kings. There we read that Nebuchadnezzar “carried into exile all Jerusalem: all the officers and fighting men, and all the craftsmen and artisans — a total of ten thousand ... the entire force of seven thousand fighting men, a thousand craftsmen and artisans.”⁵ *Barnes’ Notes* comments on this: “The number of the exiles carried away is small compared with

1. Zech. 8:18-23
2. Jer. 27:16-22
3. Ezra 1:7-11
4. Heb. 9:8-10

the 42,360 men who returned (Ezra 2:64-65), leaving a large Jewish population behind at Babylon. But a continual drain of people from Judaea was going on, and the 10,000 carried away with Jehoiachin formed the nucleus and center, and gave tone to the whole (see 2 Kings 24:14). When they began to thrive in Babylon, large numbers would emigrate there of their own accord. A comparison of this chapter with the parallel portion of 2 Kings shows that though not free from clerical errors and mistakes of copyists the body of the text is remarkably sound. Many of the differences between the two texts are abbreviations made purposely by the compiler of the Book of Kings; others are the result of negligence; and upon the whole the text of the Book of Kings is inferior to that of the Appendix to the Book of Jeremiah. Bearing in mind, however, that possibly they are not two transcripts of the same text, but the result of an independent use by two different writers of the same original authority, their complete agreement, except in trivial matters and mistakes easy of correction, is a satisfactory proof of the general trust-worthiness of the Masoretic Text in all more important particulars.”

The chapter ends on a positive note, as if the editor who added this last chapter to Jeremiah’s scroll did not want to leave his readers without comfort. The exoneration of Jehoiachin must have given a boost to the morale of all the captives. As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “Seals found in Palestine lead us to infer that the Judeans continued to consider him as the reigning king, and Zedekiah (his uncle) merely as a regent.”

R. K. Harrison, in *Jeremiah & Lamentations*, comments on vv.31-34: “The accession of *Evil-Merodach*, i.e. Amel Marduk, son of Nebuchadnezzar, who reigned for only one year (561-560 BC), saw better treatment accorded to the Judean royal family. Tablets recovered from the ruined Ishtar Gate in Babylon confirm that Jehoiachin was a recipient of the king’s bounty. These stark historical facts come as a rather anticlimactic postscript to a period of high spiritual drama. The message of Jeremiah, so long derided by his compatriots, has finally brought the promised punishment upon his apostate and idolatrous people, and the chastening discipline of exile has begun. Despite this dreadful calamity there lingers the hope that God will restore His people, bringing a faithful remnant back to repopulate the homeland.

5. II Kings 24:12-16