

# Jeremiah: New European Christadelphian Commentary

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# PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. Charities such as Carelinks Ministries and the Christadelphian Advancement Trust endeavour to provide totally free copies worldwide according to resources and donations available to them. But there is a desire by many to go beyond those brief comments on each chapter, and delve deeper into the text. The New European Christadelphian commentary seeks to meet that need. As with all Divine things, beauty becomes the more apparent the closer we analyze. We can zoom in the scale of investigation to literally every letter of the words used by His Spirit. But that would require endless volumes. And academic analysis is no more nor less than that; we are to live by His word. This commentary seeks to achieve a balance between practical teaching on one hand, and a reasonable level of thorough consideration of the original text. On that side of things, you will observe in the commentary a common abbreviation: “s.w.”. This stands for “same word”; the same original Greek or Hebrew word translated [A] is used when translated [B]. This helps to slightly remove the mask of translation through which most Bible readers have to relate to the original text.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But finally- don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

If you would like to enable the NEV Bible and associated material to remain freely available, do consider making a donation to Carelinks Ministries or The Christadelphian Advancement Trust. And please pray that our sending forth of God's word will bring back glory to His Name and that of His dear Son whom we serve.

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## Jeremiah Chapter 1

*Jeremiah 1:1 The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin-* Anathoth was a village near Jerusalem. It was a priestly city (Josh. 21:18) on the great north road through which invaders would have approached Jerusalem (Is. 10:30). "The words of Jeremiah" contrasts with him using the first person in :4, so this introduction may have been added under Divine inspiration by an editor of the prophecy, perhaps Ezra.

*Jeremiah 1:2 To whom the word of Yahweh came in the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign-* Mentioned in Jer. 25:3 as the start of his 23 year ministry.

*Jeremiah 1:3 It came also in the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, to the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month-* The implication is that God ceased to speak through Jeremiah once Judah were taken captive. His silence was part of their punishment; although we note that Ezekiel continued prophesying to the exiles after this point.

*Jeremiah 1:4 Now the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* Perhaps in a vision, which is how "the word of Yahweh came..." in Gen. 15:1 (s.w.).

*Jeremiah 1:5 Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you-* This is often misread as meaning that God had a relationship with Jeremiah whilst he was a foetus. But the text says He knew him *before* that. Paul interprets it in Gal. 1:14,15 as meaning known before creation. "Formed" translates the same word Jeremiah will later use of how God as the potter or former has formed Israel in order to do His work (Jer. 18:2-6,11; 19:1,11; 33:2). So the 'forming' is not simply a reference to literal creation, but of being formed in order to fulfil a specific purpose. This involves the formation of our unique personality even before birth; the spirit of man is "formed" within us (Zech. 12:1 s.w.). Our genetic history and formation was likewise in order to be and do specific things intended in God's plan (Eph. 2:10). Man is never better than when living up to these expectations.

*Before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations-* "Sanctification" is not therefore merely forgiveness, but a calling to action. The idea of forgiveness and moral cleansing is indeed in view, but that is not to be received in a vacuum. We are sanctified so that we might be separated unto active service in response to it, with an appropriate humility. Paul clearly alludes to Jeremiah's experience (Gal. 1:15,16), and the NT applies these ideas to us all. Paul interprets being a prophet to the nations as preaching to them. This is how we who are not inspired as the prophets were can still continue their ministry.

At times, the prophets are paralleled with Israel- Jeremiah was a "prophet to the nations", and yet this was Israel's role (Is. 49:2). Both the prophets and Israel are described as "the servant of the Lord". But God and Israel were in the process of divorce, as they knew. The prophets were both on God's side, and Israel's. They were torn men. Just as God Himself was. He appeared "like a man confused" (Jer. 14:9). Jeremiah's ministry was partly "to the [Gentile nations]" in that his prophecies against Babylon and Egypt etc. were intended to elicit their repentance. or we can understand that he was a prophet about the Gentile nations in that Jeremiah repeatedly predicted those nations would attack Israel.

*Jeremiah 1:6 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child-* It is typical of God to work through those who feel the least qualified. And yet Jeremiah's objection to his calling was wrong, given that God had prepared him genetically from the beginning to be ideally suited for the calling he was now given (:5). AV is just as legitimate: "I cannot speak". This smacks of a refusal to accept the commission for which he had been prepared from the beginning of creation. The Hebrew for "child" is generally used of pre-adolescents, and it may be that indeed Jeremiah was very young. This indicates that God is active with children and they can legitimately respond to Him.

*Jeremiah 1:7 But Yahweh said to me, Don't say, 'I am a child;' for to whoever I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I shall command you, you shall speak-* He was not to keep telling himself that "I am a child...". This exhortation to watch our self-talk and negative self-perception is absolutely needed today. This could be read as

meaning that God would force Jeremiah's obedience regardless of his youth; or it could simply be a more detailed reiteration of the command just given, urging his freewill obedience to it.

*Jeremiah 1:8 Don't be afraid because of them; for I am with you to deliver you, says Yahweh-* AV "Don't be afraid of their faces" suggests this young man being cowed by the faces of those older than him to whom he had to witness. We know exactly this feeling, of inadequacy and awkwardness in making a witness. And we are encouraged hereby to go forward. The phrase is an exact quotation from the encouragements to go and possess the land at the time of the conquest (Dt. 31:6; Josh. 11:6). The unfaithful Israelites are thereby made parallel to the Canaanites; and Jeremiah like Joshua is to lead the people into possession of the kingdom of God in Israel. This was indeed the possible, potential outcome of Jeremiah's message; if Judah had repented and accepted it, then they could have been established as God's Kingdom and would triumph over all seemingly more powerful opposition. But that potential went tragically unrealized at the time. It was with these very same words that Jeremiah was to encourage the Jews to resist and not fear the Babylonians (Jer. 42:11). As he had overcome all the faces of his opponents through obedience to God's word, so all Judah could have followed Jeremiah's personal example. This is indeed how the preacher must be; the word is to become flesh in us. As Jeremiah was not afraid before the faces of opponents, so Judah were to be like him before the Babylonians.

*Jeremiah 1:9 Then Yahweh put forth His hand-* The same phrase as in Gen. 19:10, where Yahweh through the Angels put forth His hand to preserve Lot from the men of Sodom, who are presented in the prophets as representing the men of Jerusalem and Judah in their persecution of prophets like Jeremiah.

*And touched my mouth; and Yahweh said to me, Behold, I have put My words in your mouth-* The same phrase is used in the commissioning of Isaiah in Is. 6:7. The touching of the prophet's mouth was there symbolic of God forgiving Isaiah; and here the same idea may be in view, seeing that Jeremiah has just argued back with God in (like Moses) refusing the commission given to him, when God has explained that he had been born and prepared for this work. Jeremiah's reluctance to preach and struggle with God is going to be a theme of his ministry, coming to full term in Lamentations, where at the end of his life he openly struggles with God over the fulfillment of the very word which Jeremiah has been inspired to preach.

*Jeremiah 1:10 Behold, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant-* Jeremiah had complained that he was but a child, totally inadequate; and yet through the power of the word he was preaching, he had power over the nations. His prophetic word could destroy nations like Babylon and disobedient Judah, and also result in the building and planting of a new Israel if they were obedient. These words are applied to all who "overcome"; they shall likewise be given "power over the nations" (Rev. 2:26). The 'plucking up' is the word used of how Judah would be plucked up out of their land for their disobedience to the prophetic word (Dt. 29:28; 2 Chron. 7:20). And as the Gentiles plucked up / out Israel from their land, so those nations would be plucked up (Jer. 12:14,15,17). Likewise the building and planting specifically refers to the restoration of Israel after their plucking up (Jer. 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10). It was God through His word who would do these things (Jer. 18:7); but that possibility worked through the preacher and proclaimer of that word. Therefore here Jeremiah is presented as the one who would do these things. This is the enormous power delegated to all to this day who preach His word; we really can save people, plant them in the Kingdom by sowing the seed of the Kingdom; and those who refuse will be plucked up.

"Break down" is the word specifically used about the throwing down of the temple and great houses of Jerusalem (Jer. 33:4; 39:8). Likewise "overthrow" is used in this sense, specifically about Judah and Jerusalem (Jer. 31:28,40). The building and planting are the words used of how God potentially would have restored and rebuilt the kingdom of God in Israel had Judah repented (s.w. Jer. 24:6; 31:28). The plural "nations and kingdoms" in view are therefore epitomized in the fate of Judah; although perhaps intensive plurals are being used here, in the sense of 'the one great nation' and 'one great kingdom' of Judah. Or it could be that the plural refers to Israel and Judah; for at times the ten tribe kingdom are also in view in Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 1:11 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? I said, I see a branch of an almond tree-* The almond is the first tree in Palestine to bud, so it means literally the watching tree, as if it were alive and eager to come to life. The idea was that God's prophetic word of judgment against His people, as well as the potentials for restoration, were very soon to come true, and there was an eagerness and energy latent within the word of prophecy to achieve its own ends.

*Jeremiah 1:12 Then Yahweh said to me, You have seen well; for I watch over My word to perform it-* He would watch over His word to achieve the breaking down and building up just spoken of in :10; as is stated specifically in Jer. 31:28.

The word translated 'hasten' or "watch over" is very similar to the word for 'almond'. Almonds are associated with God's eyes; the bowls of the lampstands were almonds (Ex. 25:33,34). Zech. 4:2 talks about these almond bowls on the candlestick, and Zech. 4:10 interprets them as the "eyes of the LORD which run to and fro through the whole earth". 2 Chron. 16:9 talks about the Angels in the same way; "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him". Similarly in Rev. 4:5 the lamps in the bowls of almond are equated with the "seven spirits (or Angels) of God". Rev. 5:6 equates the seven eyes with the seven spirits. Thus the almond rod which Jeremiah saw represented God's eyes or Angels who would watch over the word of God which Jeremiah was to speak to perform it. See on Dan. 9:14.

*Jeremiah 1:13 The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying, What do you see? I said, I see a boiling cauldron; and it is tipping away from the north-* It was about to be poured out southwards, upon Judah. Ez. 11:3; 24:3 use the boiling cauldron as a symbol of Jerusalem. Perhaps in Ez. 11:3 the false prophets had purposefully wrested Jeremiah's prophecy here to say that the cauldron represented Jerusalem rather than Babylon, and it would give them protection from Babylon. This is typical of how Divine words are wrested out of context in accordance with the desired narrative of the false teacher.

*Jeremiah 1:14 Then Yahweh said to me, Out of the north evil will break out on all the inhabitants of the land-* The pouring out of the cauldron was the breaking out of evil from Babylon.

*Jeremiah 1:15 For, behold, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says Yahweh; and they shall come, and they shall each set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah-* God's judgment was to be uttered as it were from the judgment thrones of the invaders which would be set up at the gates of Jerusalem, the place of power and judgment.

*Jeremiah 1:16 I will utter My judgements against them touching all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken Me and have burned incense to other gods-* This is evidence that 'the judgment seat' isn't the weighing up of evidence which we may tend to think of it as. Pilate sat on the judgment seat not to weigh up evidence but to pronounce the verdict (Jn. 19:13). Herod sat on the judgment seat in order to make "an oration" to the people, supposedly on God's behalf (Acts 12:21 RVmg.). It wasn't to weigh up any evidence- it was to make a statement. And thus it will be in the final judgment. Also, "judge" is often used in the sense of 'to condemn'- not to just consider evidence (e.g. Mt. 7:2; Rom. 3:7; 2 Thess. 2:17). The trial of our faith is going on now; the judgment will simply formally reveal the verdict which is now being arrived at. The Father judges now "according to every man's work" (1 Pet. 1:17), as He did in OT times: "Thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Ps. 62:12).

*And worshipped the works of their own hands-* The equivalent of idolatry today is reliance upon our own works. These then become our idols.

*Jeremiah 1:17 You therefore put your belt on your waist, arise, and speak to them all that I command you-* Jeremiah's temptation, as ours, may have been to only speak forth part of God's message.

*Don't be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you before them-* James 5:10 puts it bluntly- the prophets are to be taken by us as our examples. Jeremiah was warned: "Be not dismayed of *them*, lest I dismay *you*" (Jer. 1:17 RV). This is alluded to by the Lord when He tells us that if we are ashamed of Him and His words, then He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). The connection surely indicates that the Old Testament prophets and the spirit of their commissioning is intended to apply to us today in our fulfilling of the great commission. Thus the prophets become our pattern for witness; they are our "brethren the prophets" (Rev.22:9). And so an understanding of them becomes programmatic for our witness today. Our audience, the world in which we live, is in essence that in which the prophets lived.

Jeremiah remembered this command not to be dismayed and quotes it back to himself in Jer. 17:18. This is how we should act- quoting scripture to ourselves as encouragement. We note that later it is the righteous remnant who are

commanded not to be dismayed (Jer. 30:10 s.w.); Jeremiah was to be their example and representative.

*Jeremiah 1:18 For, behold, I have made you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land-* This was true potentially, but Jeremiah still had to make the necessary freewill decisions. Jeremiah later speaks of how he came to see Israel for who they were: "The Lord made it known to me and I knew; then thou didst show me their evil deeds" (Jer. 11:8). Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

Right in the context of God predicting the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is presented as a strong, fortified city, made strong by God against any opposition. The implication was that the faithful should identify with Jeremiah if they wished to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the same term for "fortified city" in urging the faithful to run into one in the face of the Babylonian advance (Jer. 4:5). But that fortified city was himself and the community of the faithful.

*Jeremiah 1:19 They will fight against you; but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you, says Yahweh, to deliver you-* Jeremiah needed reminded of this promise in Jer. 15:20 where it is repeated word for word. The aggression of the people against Jeremiah was extreme. As he faced death in the cistern, he must have struggled to believe them. "I am with you" is the language of God encouraging Moses and Joshua, that inheritance of the kingdom land was possible, and :17 is likewise an allusion to this. The hint may be that Jeremiah's ministry could have resulted in the restoration of the Kingdom, and the faithful remnant inheriting it in his time.

## Jeremiah Chapter 2

*Jeremiah 2:1 The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* This was aimed specifically at "Jerusalem" (:2), which could refer to the leadership and priesthood.

*Jeremiah 2:2 Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, 'Thus says Yahweh, I remember the kindness of your youth, the love at the time of your marriage; how you went after Me in the wilderness-* The exodus and wilderness journey is described as God, a young man, being madly in love with the young woman of Israel. It was He who took the initiative in going after them; but He imputes this to them, just as the lover eagerly imagines that the object of love has the same passion for him as he does toward her. And they hardly showed *chesed*, covenant love ["kindness"], toward God. How could a God who loves purity, who cannot look upon iniquity, fall in love so passionately with such a reprobate crew? It cannot be that God turned a blind eye to their sin. And how can Israel be described as going after God in the wilderness, showing Him all their love when in their hearts, from Egypt right through the wilderness journey, "they despised my judgments... (and thus) rebelled against me" (Ez. 20:8,13,16,21)? This was the overpowering love which imputes love and righteousness to the beloved. So this was a reminder of how Israel were in covenant with God on the basis of having had His love imputed to them.

*In a land that was not sown-* These are the words used of how in the Sabbath and jubilee years, the land was not to be sown, and yet God would provide for His people (Lev. 25:4,11). Perhaps Jeremiah was prophesying in one such year. But the allusion is surely to how the land of Israel was to become barren, a land now sown, in punishment for their sins (Dt. 29:23 s.w.). Even in this case, the promise is that God would lead the faithful remnant of the people through it, as He had led Israel through a similar environment.

*Jeremiah 2:3 Israel was holiness to Yahweh-* The very term inscribed upon the high priestly mitre (Ex. 28:36). The high priest was not intended to 'do it all' for Israel, as priests in secular religions are intended to. He was to be representative in essence of all God's people. But "holy to Yahweh" can simply mean dedicated to Him., and the context is of their marriage to Yahweh as an exclusive covenant (:2). This verse goes on to say that they were His "firstfruits", His firstborn Son, dedicated to Himself. That they dedicated their firstborn to Moloch was the more awful because of this.

*The first fruits of His increase. All who devour him shall be held guilty. Evil shall come on them', says Yahweh-* Israel were Yahweh's firstborn (Jer. 31:9), and therefore He slew the firstborn of an Egypt which had destroyed them. And this would continue in the judgment of Babylon. The figure of firstborn raises the fascinating question as to whether God had had 'sons' before in His history. The metaphor implies He had not, at least not in this intimate sense. Israel's failure was the more tragic, therefore; although they were replaced as firstborn by His only begotten Son, His firstborn. And all those in Him likewise become the firstborn, with promise therefore of many children yet to come in future creations.

"Devour" is literally 'to eat', and is used of how Babylon "consumed" Jerusalem with fire (Neh. 2:3,13 etc.). The people and their land were to be "consumed" by the fire which was contained in the words Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 5:14,17). But all who devoured / consumed them would be "held guilty" (Jer. 2:3; 10:25; 30:16). And yet in depression, Jeremiah lamented that the fire had consumed (Lam. 2:3; 4:11), when it was His own words which had been that devouring fire. His lament was therefore tantamount to a statement of regret that he had been used as the vehicle for this devouring fire. The devourers of Israel considered themselves "not guilty" because Judah had sinned against their God (Jer. 50:7). But the clear statement in Jer. 2:3 is that "All who devour him shall be held guilty". Punishing a sinner doesn't mean that those who do the punishing are thereby justified; we can be used by God, but that is no guarantee of righteousness or acceptability. This needs to be remembered by those who consider they can punish sinners within the church; they may well be held equally guilty for the lack of love they showed.

*Jeremiah 2:4 Hear the word of Yahweh O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel!*- God's intention was to restore the ten tribes and revive the apostate kingdom of Judah into His kingdom on earth. So this may well be addressed to the ten tribes, and presumably someone took Jeremiah's message to them.

*Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says Yahweh, What unrighteousness have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from*

*Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?*- This appears addressed to the "fathers" who were still alive; for they "are" become vain, and the sense is that these fathers had and continued to find fault in Yahweh. Perhaps Jeremiah as a very young person was being asked to appeal here specifically to the younger generation; for youth need youth to appeal to them. "Gone far from me" is a word used of Israel's exile at the hands of their invaders (Is. 6:12; 26:15; Jer. 27:10). But this, like all judgments, was only a reflection of how they had gone far from God in their hearts (s.w. Is. 29:13). To find something unclean in the other party and therefore to go far from them is the language of marriage breakup; which is the context of :2. It was Israel who were ending the marriage, not God; and had gone off with "vanity", other gods. It's not hard to discern the "idols" of our age- they are the various "vanities" which so easily fill human life in this online age.

*Jeremiah 2:6 Neither did they say, 'Where is Yahweh who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that none passed through, and where no man lived?'* - The memory of their historical beginnings and salvation by grace through baptism in the Red Sea was intended to remain with them. And with us too. Their passage so far was by grace alone, for nobody could have survived the journey they had made were it not for God. And this is true of each of us. "The shadow of death" is really 'deep darkness'. The idea of being preserved from "pits" would have recurred to Jeremiah when in the cistern.

*Jeremiah 2:7 I brought you into a plentiful land, to eat its fruit and its goodness; but when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination-* This continues a major Biblical theme- that God's loving material blessings of His people led them to idolatry (Dt. 32:15). The prosperity Gospel must give due weight to this sad experience of God's people historically. Israel brought the idols of Egypt with them through the wilderness, and lost no time in using them and defiling the land thereby. The popular idea that the generation who entered the land were the most faithful of Israel's generations needs some revision.

*Jeremiah 2:8 The priests didn't say, 'Where is Yahweh?' and those who handle the law didn't come to know Me. The rulers also transgressed against Me, the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit-* The reason for their turning to other gods was because the priests, who were supposed to teach the knowledge of Yahweh, didn't seek to know Him; and what knowledge they did have was not the 'knowing' of personal relationship. We can know true propositions about God, but not thereby come "to know Me". A teacher must himself be continually learning and enquiring further. But the priests assumed they knew it all; when in fact what they did know was not the same as "knowing Me" in terms of personal relationship. And so they slipped off to idolatry. Although they had been given materially all that they needed on entering the land (Jer. 2:7), the attraction of the idols was "profit". The idols of Canaan were fertility cults, and they were worshipped in the hope of good harvests and material benefits (Jer. 12:13). So Yahweh's blessing of His people materially only elicited in them a craving for yet more materialism, and they turned to the idols- which in reality did not "profit", for all such blessing is only from Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 2:9 Therefore I will yet contend with you, says Yahweh, and I will contend with your children's children-* This is the language of entering into a law suite; and the results of it were going to last many generations. Or perhaps the idea is that grandparents, their children and grandchildren were all alike guilty and must stand before Divine judgment.

*Jeremiah 2:10 For pass over to the islands of Kittim, and see; and send to Kedar, and consider diligently; and see if there has been such a thing-* The Gentiles were fiercely loyal to their gods, whereas Israel were for ever seeking some petty advantage or "profit" from adopting new gods. The islands of Kittim were the extreme west of Israel, and "Kedar" to the extreme east. He was a son of Ishmael (Gen. 25:13); a reminder that there was more integrity in the line God had chosen not to work through than in that of Isaac and Jacob.

*Jeremiah 2:11 Has a nation changed its gods, which really are no gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit-* Israel in the wilderness had changed their glory into the similitude of an ox, the golden calf (Ps. 106:20). And now Judah were committing the same error. They prided themselves on not having the golden calves of the ten tribe kingdom, but they did have the equivalent in their hearts. Gentile nations didn't

change their gods; but God's people did, ever seeking a little extra material benefit from some new religion; see on :8. This is one of many examples of where unbelievers are held up as a challenge to believers; and we can take that challenge for all time.

*Jeremiah 2:12 Be astonished, you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Be very desolate, says Yahweh-* "Desolate" is "dry", so the heavens / skies addressed may be literal. This theme of water continues in :13. There was to be a drought as a reflection of God's withholding the blessings He had given when they first entered the land.

*Jeremiah 2:13 For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the spring of living waters, and cut them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water-* There was to be a drought and no water from Yahweh at all (:12). Sin has various component factors, because God is so sensitive to human behaviour. The sin of forsaking Him was separate to that of adopting other gods. Baal was thought to be the rain god, and Israel's addictive desire for extra fertility and material blessing led them to accept Baal. But Baal was no better than a broken cistern; any water that came would be wasted and could not be kept by Israel. And in any case, it was God who gave rain and He was going to therefore punish them by drying up the skies (:12).

*Jeremiah 2:14 Is Israel a servant? Is he a native-born slave? Why has he become a prey?-* As noted on :3, Israel were God's firstborn son. They were not slaves born in the house, like Ishmael. But they acted as if they were not the native born members of God's family, by seeking other gods. And so they were treated appropriately to their own self-perception and self-identification. I explained on :8,11 that Israel turned to other gods in the hope of petty material benefit. They were therefore to become a "prey", to have their material things taken from them as booty.

*Jeremiah 2:15 The young lions have roared at him and yelled, they have desolated his land. His cities are burned up without inhabitant-* This is an example of the prophetic perfect, whereby things prophesied in the future are spoken of as having already happened; so certain are they of fulfilment. Just possibly the fate of the ten tribes is in view. The Divine threat to leave Judah "without inhabitant" never quite came true. Not all the urban dwellers were slain. Indeed even after the destruction of Jerusalem, they still came to offer at the site of the altar in Jerusalem (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy. Perhaps He perceived that repentance would not be elicited by the judgments, and so they have been deferred until the last days. Or maybe there was some repentance or intercession which ameliorated the threatened judgments. And yet "young lions" is a double symbol, both of the Babylonians and of the rulers of Judah in Ezekiel; it was for their sakes that the Babylonian lions came.

*Jeremiah 2:16 The children also of Memphis and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head-* Egypt was always attractive for Judah to trust in. But the Egyptians 'shaved the head' (Heb.) of Judah, taking their glory away, at great cost to them (2 Kings 23:35) but provided no help against Babylon.

*Jeremiah 2:17 Haven't you procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, when He led you by the way?-* If we follow the moment by moment leading of God, having the attitude that we will always say "Yes" to Him, then we will not go astray to idols. And all judgment for such sin is really brought about by the sinners themselves. If we leave the God who is leading us, then we for sure will go astray to other gods and face the appropriate judgment.

*Jeremiah 2:18 Now what have you to do in the way to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shihor? Or what have you to do in the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?-* "Shihor" may be another name for the Nile, which represented Egypt as the Euphrates did Assyria. Judah were always trying to get help from their northern or southern neighbour against the threat posed by the other, instead of trusting in Yahweh above them. The attempted alliance with Egypt is described in Ez. 16:26 as active prostitution with her, when Yahweh would have provided all the freedom and protection Judah wanted. Menahem king of Israel bribed Pul king of Assyria to support him, whilst Hoshea sought the aid of Egypt to enable him to throw off the Assyrians, and Josiah died fighting against the Egyptians on the behalf of Assyria. This is portrayed in Ezekiel as whoredom, the endless cycle of attraction to illicit lovers.

*Jeremiah 2:19 Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backsliding shall reprove you. Know therefore and*

*see that it is an evil thing and a bitter, that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, and that My fear is not in you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies-* The Divine hope was that Judah would be corrected by their sins and judgments experienced; "know therefore..." is an appeal for relationship, for understanding and repentance. But this didn't come about, although it potentially could have done. The same Hebrew word for "punish" is also translated "reform / correct" (see the play on this in Lev. 26:18,23,28). The punishments were not therefore simply an expression of God's anger, but rather intended to reform Israel.

*Jeremiah 2:20 For of old time I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve;' for on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed yourself, playing the prostitute-* AV "I will not transgress" (NEV "I will not serve"). so many times God had broken the bonds of their captivity and they had promised total loyalty in response; but everywhere they still worshipped other gods. Yoke and bonds are figures of servitude. The idea was that if God had broken their bonds of servitude to the world around them, they should in response serve Him, exchanging one bondage for another, a change of masters. This was supremely seen at the exodus from the bonds of Egypt through the Red Sea baptism. And that is exactly the metaphor used by Paul in Romans 6 for our response to our freedom from this world and sin; in response, we proclaim Jesus as Lord and serve Him. But instead so many like Judah at this time served idols instead.

Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 5:5), but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

*Jeremiah 2:21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed-* How we are spiritually planted is no guarantee that we shall continue to grow in the way we were sown. The noble vine had clearly allowed foreign vine branches to be grafted in. That is the implication. And the lesson, as Paul points out in a similar analogy in Romans, is that being physically of the seed of Abraham was no guarantee at all that the fruit was going to be acceptable. And we may likewise reflect that no matter how well believing parents may plant their children, in the end this can be no guarantee that they will grow into a noble vine just because the right seed was planted. Far more individual volition than that is required. God had well planted Israel, giving them the maximal opportunity for growth and fruitfulness (Is. 5:2; Ps. 80:9; Hos. 10:1); and yet they turned to idols. The requirements for elders that their children be "not unruly" I would therefore see as relevant to their immature children and their manner of raising young families.

*How then have you turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine to Me?-* We see here God's shock and hurt at His people's dashing of His best hopes. Possibly we could say that the language more indicates the Angels' surprise at the weaknesses of their charges- "The Lord God of Hosts (Angels)... broke thy yoke, and burst thy bands (in Egypt); and thou saidst, I will not transgress (Israel's covenant of obedience to the Angel)... I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed (done by the Angel, Ps. 80:8; note the angelic context of Ps. 80): how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto Me?". But the reality is that God Himself personally can be hurt and broken by us. He limits His omniscience as He limits His omnipotence, in order to enter into real time, actual relationship with us.

*Jeremiah 2:22 For though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord Yahweh-* The idea is that any attempt to make themselves appear externally better was irrelevant, because their problem was with their mentality and heart. That is what God looks at, and this is what He 'marks'. The sin of Judah was written- both on their hearts and in God's record (Jer. 17:1); their iniquity was "marked before me". Note how their sin was written both before God and on their hearts. The state of our hearts is actually God's record of us; "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" through which He searches us (Prov. 20:27).

*Jeremiah 2:23 How can you say, 'I am not defiled. I have not gone after the Baals'? See your way in the valley. Know what you have done. You are a swift dromedary traversing her ways-* The Jews of course considered that they had not abandoned Yahweh; they were not atheists and had instead worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh, as an expansion of their devotions to Him. "The valley" is that of Hinnom where they had their high places (Jer. 7:31; 32:35). They were like a young camel in heat, desperately running around here and there looking for a partner. This was how God saw their running to various idols and gods. They were asked to look at themselves from outside of themselves: "See your way in the valley" is an invitation to take as it were an aerial photograph or video of themselves there. And this same invitation comes to us in every generation. see on Jer. 3:2.

*Jeremiah 2:24 A wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire. When she is in heat, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves. In her month, they will find her-* We all know the downward spiral into sin... how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God. Israel were seeking satisfaction from their various idols as if they were sexually addicted and hopelessly out of control. She was searching for them, and not they for her. This heightens the depth of her sin even more so.

*Jeremiah 2:25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, 'It is in vain. No, for I have loved strangers, and I will go after them'* - This passage suggests Israel were shameless. They were convinced that their behaviour was not wrong (:23). I suggest that they came to this position by assuming that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols; and that is the essence of all spiritual temptation in every age. Any appeal to them for self control was dismissed by them.

*Jeremiah 2:26 As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets-* We must contrast this with the sense of shameless devotion to idols in the previous verses. See on Jer. 3:22. They had not then been found (out); but they would be, and so sure was their future shaming in condemnation that Jeremiah spoke as if it was already being experienced by them. Judgment in essence is now. If they had realized that, then they would have repented.

*Jeremiah 2:27 Who tell wood, 'You are my father;' and a stone, 'You have brought me forth'; for they have turned their back to Me, and not their face-* See on Jer. 3:4. This contrasts with the earlier statement that they were God's firstborn (:3). But through their idolatry they denied this. This turning of the back to God was literally seen by Ezekiel, when he was shown men worshipping the sun within the temple, with their backs turned upon the holy place. God's turning away His face from them was therefore only an extension of their own attitude to Him.

*But in the time of their trouble they will say, 'Arise, and save us'* - This could be read as God sadly lamenting how He knows they will always turn to Him in time of crisis. But it could also be said as it were with joy and hope, knowing that in the final time of Jacob's trouble, God's people will turn to Him and eternally remain with Him. Yet this appears to be God's fantasy and desperate hope and imagination that His people would cry to *Him* and not the idols. But Jer. 11:12 states that His people in the "time of their trouble" (s.w.) would cry *to their idols*. It's as if by the time of Jer. 11 God as it were faces the reality that they would cry to their idols and not to Him.

*Jeremiah 2:28 But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble: for according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah-* The large number of gods is further evidence that like the out of control young camel of :23 and donkey in heat of :24, they were obsessed with finding other gods to trust, as if they were addicted to this endless search once they had cast off faith in Yahweh. The connection of thought with the earlier part of the verse seems to be: "When every city has its special deity, surely among so many there might be found one able to help his worshippers". The LXX adds: "And according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem they sacrificed to Baal". This would have been an imitation of Babylon; and so to Babylon they would be sent. Their judgment was a reflection of what they themselves wanted. If we seek above all God's Kingdom, then this will be given us.

*Jeremiah 2:29 Why will you contend with Me? You all have transgressed against Me, says Yahweh-* God understands Judah as having a legal issue with Him, when He has done nothing wrong to them, and they have done wrong to Him. Again we sense the absolute certainty of the people that they were not sinning. "I am not defiled" was their attitude (:23). Such a shameless attitude was only possible due to becoming psychologically hardened in the idea that they worshipped idols in the name of Yahweh, as an expansion of their devotions to Him. And this is the real danger of believing that our idolatry, in whatever form, is in fact serving God. It can be thinking that gossip is in fact a service and defence of God's truth; or thinking that a luxury mansion is in fact in order to serve God's people. As with Israel at this time, this will lead to an obsession with idolatry which is insatiable.

*Jeremiah 2:30 I have struck your children in vain. They received no correction. Your own sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion-* The lion was a symbol of Babylon / Assyria, but they had acted like a lion in killing

their own prophets. The correction given by the prophets and at the hands of the previous Assyrian and Babylonian incursions had not been "received". "Correction" is the same word for 'doctrine' or teaching. God's word can come to us, and especially for the illiterate in Jeremiah's time, not only through what we now call "the Bible", but through Divinely controlled experience.

*Jeremiah 2:31 Generation, consider the word of Yahweh. Have I been a wilderness to Israel? Or a land of thick darkness?*- He had been like this to Egypt, but the Israelites had had light in their areas and homes. But they considered that any correction from God was treating them as if they were not His people, and were wilfully ignorant of their salvation history.

*Why do My people say, 'We have broken loose. We will come to You no more?'* - They effectively considered they were no longer in covenant relationship with Yahweh, and acted like this. But they would never have agreed that these were their words; God counts our positions and attitudes as words.

*Jeremiah 2:32 Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me for days without number*- The implication was that they should live permanently in a state of expecting an imminent marriage ceremony. They had married God at Sinai but the hope was that God would establish an eternal Messianic kingdom with them.

*Jeremiah 2:33 How well you prepare your way to seek love! Therefore you have taught even the wicked women your ways*- Although they didn't dress themselves up for Yahweh (:32), they did in order to attract other lovers. This speaks of how they madly sought relationship with any Gentile nation whom they perceived could benefit them immediately. And just as prostitutes lead men into sin, so they had led even the Gentiles into sin, and encouraged other smaller states to likewise offer allegiance to multiple political partners at the same time. God is therefore portrayed as sensitive to even the sins of the Gentiles. Instead of being a light to the Gentile world, Israel instead had led them into sin.

*Jeremiah 2:34 Also the blood of the souls of the innocent poor is found in your skirts, even though you did not catch them in the act of burglary*- The idea is that God did not need to break through in order to see their sins; the blood of their own children and also of poor people in society whom they had used as sacrifices was as it were on their clothes. They had publically done these things in the valley of Hinnom. The LXX has: "In thine hands has been found the blood of innocent souls; I have not found them in holes, but on every oak".

*Jeremiah 2:35 Yet you said, 'I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned away from me'. Behold, I will judge you, because you say, 'I have not sinned'*- "Innocent" is a word often used about being free from a covenant contract. Perhaps the idea was as in :31, that they considered they had broken free from covenant relationship with God and therefore God should not be angry with them. But they, His wife, had broken the marital covenant... and they were not to consider they could walk away from it. It was their attitude that "I have not sinned" which was more hurtful to God than their actual sins. And so it is to this day. Or we could take "innocent" in the sense of 'cleansed', as if they believed that the cleansing of the Mosaic rituals thereby meant that their sin was dealt with and they were free to continue in sin. This was exactly the attitude of some Christians at the time of Rom. 6:1.

*Jeremiah 2:36 Why do you go about so much, ever changing your way? You will be shamed by Egypt, just as you were shamed by Assyria*- The attempted alliance with Egypt is described in Ez. 16:26 as active prostitution with her, when Yahweh would have provided all the freedom and protection Judah wanted. The final fulfilment of these prophecies as of every prophetic word will be in the final judgment of the last days. This is the scene of Rev. 16:15- the rejected being made naked in shame. This slinking back in shame will fulfil the prophecies of Is. 1:24,29 and Jer. 2:35,36, which speak of the rejected being made ashamed, becoming ashamed, of their idols. They will be made ashamed by the judgment process.

*Jeremiah 2:37 From there also you shall go forth, with your hands on your head; for Yahweh has rejected those in whom you trust, and you shall not prosper with them*- This prophecy foresaw that contrary to Jeremiah's pleading, some in Judah would flee to Egypt, and yet also be taken captive from there. And yet the people still had freewill as

to whether to flee into Egypt. This prophetic potential scenario would therefore not have come about, and this idea of Divine potential is a major theme in the prophets. We ask how did God reject Egypt in whom they trusted? The LXX has "for the Lord has rejected thine hope, and thou shalt not prosper in it". This would suggest that they thought that their trust in Egypt would be acceptable with God, despite His clearly telling them later not to go there. But He rejected that request, as it were, to accept their trust in Egypt as trust in Him. This clearly was their problem, they thought that bad behaviour could be justified as part of their worship of Yahweh. This is why repeatedly they insist that they are innocent of any wrongdoing.

## Jeremiah Chapter 3

*Jeremiah 3:1 They say, 'If a man puts away his wife and she goes from him and become another man's, should he return to her again?'. Wouldn't that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the prostitute with many lovers-* Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land (Jer. 15:19); if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

*Yet return again to Me, says Yahweh-* Within His own law, it was an abomination for a man to re-marry the woman he had divorced. Yet this notwithstanding, God abases Himself in asking worthless Israel to re-marry Him (Dt. 24:4 cp. Jer. 3:1).

*Jeremiah 3:2 Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see!*- Again, they are asked to see themselves from outside of themselves. Likewise in Jer. 2:23, "See your way in the valley" is an invitation to take as it were an aerial photograph or video of themselves there. And this same invitation comes to us in every generation.

*Where have you not been lain with? You have sat for them by the ways, as an Arabian in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and with your wickedness-* Even in Jeremiah's time, the Jews had the sense that they were superior to their 'Arabian' relatives. But here they are presented as an Arabian prostitute. Their worship of idols on the high places is directly equal to their prostitution. They were eager for these relationships, because they were addicted to getting help from others and immediate benefit, rather than going Yahweh's way. Sitting by the roadside could even mean that foreigners passing through Palestine were accosted by the Jews and asked to enter into political relationships with them.

*Jeremiah 3:3 Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain-* This had been God's way of telling them that their covenant blessings were being withheld; but still they refused to respond.

*Yet you have a prostitute's forehead, you refused to be ashamed-* The Lord hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7; Lk. 9:51); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30). Israel's shameless attitude is a major theme of God's criticism of them. They were convinced that their behaviour was not wrong (Jer. 2:23,25). I suggest that they came to this position by assuming that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols; and that is the essence of all spiritual temptation in every age.

*Jeremiah 3:4 Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth?'*- I suggest in :4,5 we have the Divine hope, a kind of interjection from Yahweh fantasizing about their repentance, putting words in their mouths, of the kind we have in Hosea. God yearned for them to realize that they were His children, He and not the idol stocks was their Father (Jer. 2:27). He presents Himself as sentimental about their past together in Egypt and the wilderness, and so wishes for them to let Him guide them again as He had done in the desert. God therefore presents Himself as made weak by the depth of His love, even for a worthless woman.

*Jeremiah 3:5 'Will He retain His anger forever? Will He keep it to the end?'* Behold, you have spoken and have done evil things, and have had your way- As explained on :4, this is still part of God's fantasy as to the words He so hoped His repentant people would say. He wanted them to realize that they had said and done evil; and we note He gives priority to the words they had spoken. He presents Himself as a man deeply sensitive to words; and we see this reflected in the Lord's later teaching as to how our words shall be the basis of our salvation or condemnation at the last day. He wanted them to understand that He was angry, but that His wrath was but for a moment and would not last (Is. 57:16; Jer. 18:23).

Or we could read :5 as Israel's response to God's desire for their repentance in :4. The prophets spoke of the amazing grace and eternal love of God for Israel, how His wrath endured but for a moment (Is. 57:16; Jer. 18:23); and yet Israel asked: "Will he be angry for ever?". They assumed the present moment is how it shall eternally be; they lacked faith to see the wider and longer plan of God. It was more than frustrating for the prophets; they shared God's feelings of having poured out so great a love, to see it ignored and disregarded by short termist vision.

*Jeremiah 3:6 Moreover, Yahweh said to me in the days of Josiah the king, Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the prostitute-* Jeremiah recalls how God's earnest desire and imagination of ten tribe Israel's repentance had been disappointed in the days of Josiah king of Judah, who made great reforms, perhaps motivated by the judgment upon the ten tribe kingdom of Israel. But the essential love of idolatry was not removed. The stress on "every high mountain" matches the impression already given that Israel had been like a sexually addicted person, they wanted relationship with every possible partner. And so Judah were also being with idols.

*Jeremiah 3:7 I said after she had done all these things, 'She will return to Me;' but she didn't return; and her treacherous sister Judah saw it-* The ten tribe kingdom appear to have been in a hopeless state spiritually. But still God was "sure" that they would return to Him. There is a word play between the original Hebrew words for "backsliding / treacherous" and "return". Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He had the same attitude to Israel in Old Testament times: "I thought that after she had done all this, she would return to me, but she did not" (Jer. 3:7 NIV). This surely is God limiting His omniscience in order to enter fully into relationship with His people in real time.

*Jeremiah 3:8 I saw, when, for the very reason of committing adultery that I had put away and given a bill of divorce to backsliding Israel, then treacherous Judah her sister didn't fear; but likewise went and played the prostitute-* The lack of "fear" in Judah repeats the theme being established; that they were shameless and refused to be convicted of their sins. They were intended to learn from Israel's sin and punishment, but instead they went ahead and sinned yet more. See on :3. God speaks as if *He* was the one who put away Israel. God allowed divorce only for the hardness of man's heart (Mt. 19:7); yet God speaks as if *He*, with all His morality and justice, was responsible for the divorce (Jer. 3:8), when in fact it was Israel who had broken the marriage contract by their unfaithfulness. But in His grace, He as it were took the blame. See on Jer. 8:21.

*Jeremiah 3:9 It happened through the lightness of her prostitution, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks-* The problem was "Because she took her whoredom lightly..." (ESV). She had a light-hearted and not serious view of life, refusing to look to the implications, corollaries and results of her sins. She just wanted to experience pleasure in the immediate moment with no thought for anything further nor wider. And this is exactly the spirit of our age.

*Jeremiah 3:10 Yet for all this her treacherous sister, Judah, has not returned to Me with her whole heart, but only in pretence, says Yahweh-* This has reference to the reforms of Josiah, which clearly did not affect the heart of the people. For they returned to their idols immediately he died. "Though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt him" (Hos. 11:7) in the way which true repentance requires. They did turn back to Yahweh- but not in their heart. Israel rejoiced in the light of John's teaching- and he taught real, on-your-knees repentance. They thought they'd repented. But the Lord describes John as mourning, and them not mourning in sympathy and response (Lk. 7:32).

*Jeremiah 3:11 Yahweh said to me, Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah-* The idea is that Israel appeared more just than Judah, for Judah had sinned worse. Judah had the example of Israel to warn them, and they failed to that and therefore became the more responsible for their sins.

*Jeremiah 3:12 Go, and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, 'Return, you backsliding Israel', says Yahweh; 'I will not look in anger on you; for I am merciful', says Yahweh. 'I will not keep anger forever-* Again there is a play on the related Hebrew words for "return" and "backsliding". Instead of turning to idolatry, they were to turn again to their God. God assures them of His essential characteristic- that His mercy is greater than His anger

with sin. No man has ever gone so far in this life that the eternal anger of God is upon him, for God doesn't keep anger for ever. This contrasts with the human tendency towards unforgiveness, and being still angry over things we were angry about decades ago. This feature of God is a strong encouragement for human repentance (Ps. 103:9; Jer. 3:5).

*Jeremiah 3:13 Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against Yahweh your God-* Presumably Jeremiah's message was to be taken to the ten tribes. The Divine hope was that Israel and Judah would repent together, and form a revived, united kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic king. Their unity would be on the basis of common experience of God's grace, their repentance and His forgiveness. It is this which is the ultimate basis of fellowship between believers.

Jeremiah uses the same phrase for "acknowledge iniquity" in saying that "we" have done so (Jer. 14:20). He either considered that he was representative of the people, or he failed to accept that their acknowledging of iniquity was only on a surface level. Although on one hand Jeremiah is in step with God's feeling and thinking, he comes over so often (especially in Lamentations) as implying that God is unjust. He has an over positive view of his people. They did not "acknowledge iniquity" as required, but he considers they had done. Or that they had done so whereas the ten tribes had not.

*And have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed My voice', says Yahweh-* This 'scattering' to the gods of many different peoples would result in them being appropriately scattered amongst those nations (s.w. Esther 3:8; Jer. 50:17; Joel 3:2). Judgment was really a reflecting back to them of what they in essence had done.

*Jeremiah 3:14 Return, backsliding children, says Yahweh; for I am a husband to you. I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion-* "Two of a family" suggests that even though the ten tribes had intermarried in captivity, they would still be miraculously 'taken' from wherever they had been scattered and returned to a restored Kingdom of God in Israel. All that was required was that they 'returned' to God, and then He would return them. Although divorced (:1), God still felt as their husband. This is surely also relevant in trying to understand how God now feels towards His people from whom He is divorced.

*Jeremiah 3:15 I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding-* The system of shepherds, be it the priesthood or the royal family, was to be replaced by one singular shepherd after the pattern of David (Ez. 34:23), although we learn here that he would have assistants who were also after God's own heart- another way of saying they too would be like David, the man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). This was God's intention for the restored Kingdom, but Israel and many of Judah didn't return. And so this will be fulfilled in the last days, when we will be those shepherds.

*Jeremiah 3:16 It shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says Yahweh, they shall say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of Yahweh!' neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they miss it; neither shall it be made any more-* The intended restoration of the kingdom would feature no ark of the covenant. The temple they were to build in Ez. 40-48 has no mention of a place for the ark, and it concludes with the comment that the city will be called "Yahweh Shammah", the Lord is there. His personal presence would be there. This great potential wasn't fulfilled, so it has been reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, when as Revelation says, God Himself shall be with us. The ark was a contentious issue at the time, with Judah considering they had God on their side because the ark was with them and not the ten tribes. But this mere symbolism would be irrelevant before the very presence of God Himself; as will so much of our contentions with other believers.

*Jeremiah 3:17 At that time they shall call Jerusalem 'The throne of Yahweh;' and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh, to Jerusalem-* As explained on :16, this is the equivalent of Jerusalem being called "Yahweh Shammah" in Ezekiel. The nations, who had abused Israel and Judah, were to be gathered again to Jerusalem; not to judge Jerusalem, but in repentance and acceptance of Israel's God.

*Neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart-* Nobody in our current society would consider what you *think* to be a criminal act; and nobody did in early Israel, either. But time and again, the prophets

passionately call down judgment for “evil thoughts” and “evil hearts” (Jer. 3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

*Jeremiah 3:18 In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north-* Although God tacitly accepts Judah would sin, refuse Jeremiah's message and go into captivity, yet He looked ahead to how they would return together with the ten tribes. Their unity would be on the basis of common experience of God's grace, their repentance and His forgiveness. It is this which is the ultimate basis of fellowship between believers.

*To the land that I gave for an inheritance to your fathers-* The latter chapters of Ezekiel stress how Israel were to “inherit” the land; yet the same word is used in other restoration prophecies, about Messiah causing Israel to “inherit” the land again after their return from “the north country” (Zech. 2:12; 8:12; Is. 49:8; Jer. 3:18). When Judah returned from the “north country”, then Jerusalem would be the universally recognized “throne of the Lord” (Jer. 3:17,18). The Kingdom could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in Ez. 47:13-21 and share it out between the 12 tribes. But they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

*Jeremiah 3:19 But I thought how I would set you among My children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the armies of the nations; and I thought you would call Me My Father, and would not turn away from following Me'-* God's being apparently mistaken because of His over enthusiasm for Israel reflects His limiting of His omniscience in order to enter into legitimate real time relationship with His people. Despite realizing this, in :22 God still offers to restore them. His enthusiasm to almost force through His intentions with His beloved stands for all time as an encouragement to His people.

*Jeremiah 3:20 Surely as a wife faithlessly departs from her husband, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, house of Israel, says Yahweh-* Their lack of faith was the essence of their immorality and seeking other gods. Despite the passion of His love (see on :19), God doesn't turn a blind eye to what they had done. The breaking of faith was breaking covenant; this is the essence of sin. We are to forever remember that we are in the bonds of an eternal covenant, and only wilfully walking away from it can end our part in it.

*Jeremiah 3:21 A voice is heard on the bare heights, the weeping and the petitions of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten Yahweh their God-* The high places were where they worshipped idols. The tragedy was that even in the desperation of their nadir, they still would turn to their idols rather than fully to Yahweh. He simply cannot be one of many options we try in order to get us out of crises. Or it could be that this verse is another example of God as it were interjecting with His own fantasy of how they would repent; there on the high places, before their idols, He envisaged them realizing how vain were the idols, how they had forgotten Yahweh, and then by implication calling upon Him alone. Perhaps Daniel understood this verse like this, when he prays and confesses that “we” had perverted God's way (Dan. 9:5 s.w.). We notice that individual acts of sin aren't in view; rather is the issue with a “way” of being, thinking and living.

*Jeremiah 3:22 Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backsliding-* This is a promise to psychologically change them, if they were willing. And this operation upon their very heart or mind is the promise of the new covenant in Jer. 31 and Ez. 20. Although God's people refused that new covenant at that time, it is that which is made with us, and the psychological transformation of His Spirit is just as much available to us today.

*Behold, we have come to You; for You are Yahweh our God-* As suggested on :21, this seems to be God's almost placing words in their mouths in His imagination. The hopefulness and fantasy of God for Israel often comes out in His statements that Israel definitely will repent “As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so *is* [note the present tense] the house of Israel ashamed” (Jer. 2:26). This was God's fantasy for His people. Hosea is full of this. So here too, this latter sentence is God's fantasy about Israel, imagining them saying those words. How bitter was His disappointment therefore- and how great His delight in those of us who in our weakness do come unto Him and recognize Him meaningfully as our God. Indeed the whole of Jer. 3:22-25 is full of God fantasizing about the sort of

words Israel would say upon their repentance, and how they would take responsibility for their sins rather than blame them on their fathers . This apparent certainty that Israel would repent and thus obviate the threatened judgments must have conflicted within the thinking of the Father- with His certainty that all was already too late for them. Hence passages like Hos. 11:8 speaks of the burning pain within the thought processes of God Almighty.

*Jeremiah 3:23 Truly in vain is help from the hills, the tumult on the mountains. Truly the salvation of Israel is in Yahweh our God-* God hoped Israel would come to realize that the various gods of the high places ("hills") and the whole ranges of mountains, representing the nations, could not save them. Rather was salvation (*teshua*) only in Yahweh. This would then make the word *Yeshua*, the Hebrew name for "Jesus", the salvation of Yahweh. Finally this hoped for repentance and acceptance of Yah's salvation will come true in the latter day repentance of Israel and acceptance of Jesus as God's Son and the source of their salvation.

*Jeremiah 3:24 But the shameful thing has devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters-* God hopes and imagines that they will recognize that Baal worship, "the shameful thing", had robbed them of the blessings which He had given them. The phrase "devoured the labours" is that used in Dt. 28:33 of how the invading armies would devour Israel's labours. But as so often, this judgment was only in fact what the people had themselves chosen. For they had allowed Baal to devour their labours.

*Jeremiah 3:25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us; for we have sinned against Yahweh our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day. We have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God-* This concludes God's fantasy about how His people would repent, the position they would adopt (lying down in shame) and the words they would say. Instead of prostrating themselves before the shameful thing (Baal), they would lie down in shame before God, in repentance. Fantasy or imagination is part of what it is to be made in God's image; and we must ask ourselves what our deepest hopes really are, and whether our fantasy or imagination for those who hurt us is their repentance and reconciliation... As it was God's for His spiteful people. Shame / confusion covered the faces of God's people when the temple was desecrated (Jer. 51:51 s.w.), but this was because their faces had not been covered with shame at their sins. It's shame for sin now, or shame at judgment day.

## Jeremiah Chapter 4

*Jeremiah 4:1 If you will return, Israel, says Yahweh, if you will return to Me-* The Hebrew implies as AV that 'If you will return, then return to Me'. We can confuse a desire for change, a fleeting twinge of conscience, with real repentance. "They return, but not to the most High" (Hos. 7:16). They had the sense that they must turn away from the way they were in, but this wasn't necessarily the same as turning back behind the Lord.

*And if you will put away your abominations out of My sight; then you shall not be removed-* If there was a real turning to God, then God would not remove Judah into captivity. Or it could be that the ten tribes are still the subject, as they largely were in the previous chapter. If they returned to God, then He would miraculously return them to their land; and they would never again be removed. This would imply that some kind of Kingdom of God situation would have been established then, under a Messianic ruler, with the Gentile nations glorifying Israel's God (:2).

*Jeremiah 4:2 And you shall swear, 'As Yahweh lives', in truth, in justice, and in righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory-* When Israel return to the Lord and swear in truth that "the Lord lives", then all the other nations of the world will be blessed in the coming of the Kingdom. Their repentance is a prerequisite for the second coming. The implication is that this could have happened at Jeremiah's time, see on :1. It didn't, and so the fulfilment is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

The implication is that God's people swore that "Yahweh lives" but without moral justice and right behaviour. To believe that God exists is therefore to act like Him, in truth, justice and righteousness. To live otherwise is to effectively deny His existence. His very existence is therefore an imperative to live and be as He is.

*Jeremiah 4:3 For thus says Yahweh to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground-* This repentance could have brought about some kind of Kingdom situation as described in :1,2. The idea of using fallow ground is that they were to realize their potential- which was that it Judah repented and so did the ten tribes, then those tribes would be regathered into a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel. We too must "break up our fallow ground" (Heb. 'plough the unploughed'), analyze ourselves from outside ourselves, and use our time and our "all things" to the utmost of their potential (Hos. 10:12). We were created "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10); we were redeemed that we might be zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14)- not that we might drift through life playing with our hobbies and with the fascinations of our careers.

*And don't sow among thorns-* The Lord's parable of the sower alludes here. The thorns to Him meant the cares of life and the desire for wealth in the here and now (Mk. 4:19). This was Judah's problem; all their idolatry was choosing the fertility cults in order to get immediate material blessing.

*Jeremiah 4:4 Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings-* To self circumcise is the picture of intimate involvement with oneself. This is what they were asked to do to their own minds and hearts; see on :9. They could have avoided the wrath to come by quenching the fire of that wrath through reformation of their own hearts. We note the paramount importance of the heart; there is no specific call to quit idolatry or any specific manifestation of sin, because the essence was and is in the heart. Here at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication is that the wrath could be quenched still; but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

*Jeremiah 4:5 Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem; say, 'Blow the trumpet in the land!' Cry aloud and say, 'Assemble yourselves! Let us go into the fortified cities!'-* The "cities" may be an intensive plural for the one great city, Zion. For in :7 it seems that God's wrath was at a point where the other cities would be destroyed, but if the people entered Jerusalem in repentance, then although the invaders would surround her, He would miraculously

deliver her. This of course is what had happened a few generations before in the time of Hezekiah and the Assyrian invasion. God was willing to use that as a prototype for their salvation now from Babylon. A restored Kingdom of God could have emerged after the destruction of the Assyrians; but Judah didn't really repent, and Hezekiah let the baton drop. But now, out of their sin and the need to judge it, there was to be another opportunity. See on :8; Jer. 5:1; 6:23.

Right in the context of God predicting the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah is presented as a strong, fortified city, made strong by God against any opposition (Jer. 1:18). The implication was that the faithful should identify with Jeremiah if they wished to avoid the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah uses the same term for "fortified city" here in urging the faithful to run into one in the face of the Babylonian advance. But that fortified city was himself and the community of the faithful.

*Jeremiah 4:6 Set up a standard towards Zion. Flee for safety! Don't wait; for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction-* See on :5; Jer. 5:10. There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant. This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go into those other defenced cities (:29; Jer. 8:14).

*Jeremiah 4:7 A lion is gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations; he is on his way, he is gone forth from his place, to make your land desolate, that your cities be laid waste, without inhabitant-* Already God had raised up the Babylonians. They had only recently come to prominence by defeating Assyria, and were still somewhat of an unknown quantity at the time Jeremiah's ministry began. The extent of destruction threatened here didn't totally come; the majority of the peasants remained in the land, and they still brought food offerings to the temple even after the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy.

The collapsing of time at the judgment would mean that the events used to punish the world could fall upon the rejected from the judgment seat. These unfortunate individuals will be threshed, as will the world be (Mt. 3:12; Rev. 16:16). This is foreshadowed by the way apostate Israel were treated like the surrounding Gentile world ("nations") in the time of their judgments (Jer. 4:7).

*Jeremiah 4:8 For this clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail; for the fierce anger of Yahweh hasn't turned back from us-* The implication is that such repentance would turn back Yahweh's wrath; Joel uses similar language. Sackcloth and wailing suggested a death had happened; they were to believe they were condemned and the death sentence had been passed, and to lament it; and yet they could repent. I suggested on :5 that they were being encouraged to copy the example of Hezekiah turning away the Assyrians; and his urgent appeal for repentance had led to Yahweh's fierce anger being turned back (s.w. 2 Chron. 29:10; 30:8).

*Jeremiah 4:9 It shall happen at that day, says Yahweh, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder-* We note the continued stress upon the state of their heart; see on :4. The focus is not upon how they would be slain, tortured, have their eyes put out etc.- but upon the mental, internal panic and collapse they would experience. The physical "desolation" of the land would be matched by the internal, psychological desolation of the priests (s.w. "astonished"). Jeremiah felt the same as the other priests; he was desolated / astonished (s.w.) at the desolation of Jerusalem (Lam. 1:4,13). We can read this as meaning that he as the righteous totally identified with the wicked; or that he was too identified with the wicked priests, and felt like them when instead he should have perceived that this was exactly the astonishment of the priests which he had prophesied.

*Jeremiah 4:10 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem in saying, 'You shall have peace;' whereas the sword reaches to the heart-* Again, as noted on :9, Jeremiah perceives that the judgments will be upon their hearts. The promise of peace was if the people repented; but Jeremiah considered it so obvious that they wouldn't repent that he therefore accuses God of being unreasonable in even speaking of the possibility of peace. Here we see Jeremiah's struggle with God; his experience of Divine inspiration didn't make him just a mere instrument for relaying God's word. He was personally involved in it. I noted on :5 and :8 the similarities

with the siege of Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah; and the same word was used by Rabshakeh in warning that Hezekiah and Isaiah were deceiving the people by saying there would be peace through Divine salvation (2 Chron. 32:15). This further indicates that Jeremiah was out of step with God in his feelings. God perhaps corrects things by saying that the people were deceiving themselves in thinking that the Babylonians would withdraw, because their false prophets had deceived them to think this (Jer. 29:8; 37:9).

*Jeremiah 4:11 At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A hot wind from the bare heights in the wilderness towards the daughter of My people, not to winnow, nor to cleanse-* The high places ("bare heights") were the scene of their apostasy with the idols. This wind represented the invasion; but "wind" and "spirit" are the same word in Hebrew, and the idea as in Ezekiel's vision of the cherubim was that the invasion would be moved by God's Spirit. It came down, as it were, from the high places. At this point, God's wrath was such that He intended simply to destroy; but elsewhere He says that the judgments were indeed "to cleanse" His people in a national sense (Ez. 20:38 s.w.). Again we see Him relenting; although perhaps the idea is that those destroyed were not personally cleansed, although the cleansing was to be thus achieved on a national level.

*Jeremiah 4:12 A full wind for these things shall come from Me. Now I will also utter judgements against them-* This is the language of the judge uttering the final judgment after the case has been considered. LXX "a spirit of full vengeance shall come upon me" may indeed be the idea; but God never carried out "full vengeance", in wrath He remembered mercy.

*Jeremiah 4:13 Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles-* As noted on :11, this is the equivalent to Ezekiel's vision of the clouds and chariots of the cherubim, God's Spirit in action, being manifested in the chariots and dust clouds thus formed by the invaders.

*Woe to us! For we are ruined-* This is Jeremiah's interjection. He sees the personal truth of the message he is relaying. Likewise Jeremiah responds to the prophecy he has to utter against the hated Philistines by begging the Father to limit these judgments, presumably on account of their repentance: "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still" (Jer. 47:6). Here likewise he almost interrupts a prophecy he is giving to Israel about judgment to come by appealing for them *therefore* to repent (Jer. 4:13,14). Our handling of the prophecies of judgment to come should have a like effect upon us: they should inspire us to an inevitable witness. Each of our days cannot be just 'the same old scene' when we see the world in this way.

*Jeremiah 4:14 Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?-* This is Jeremiah's personal appeal for repentance; he so believed that what he had prophesied would come true. Again the appeal is for reformation of thought patterns; see on :4. "Evil" is literally 'vain', a word often associated with the "vanities" of the idols. But the essence of idolatry, then as now, was vain thinking, emptiness of heart. That to this day is the essence of idolatry, and the prophetic call is not let this vanity lodge within us, but to cast out those thoughts.

*Jeremiah 4:15 For a voice declares from Dan, and publishes evil from the hills of Ephraim-* These were areas within the ten tribe kingdom which had already been carried captive. The idea is that from there would come advance warning of the Babylonian advance; just as Judah ought to have taken warning from the judgment upon the ten tribes.

*Jeremiah 4:16 Tell the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, 'Watchers come from a far country and lift up their voice against the cities of Judah-* Why should the Gentile nations also be informed of the Babylonian advance? Presumably in the hope that they too would repent and turn to Yahweh; for this was the Divine intention. "Watchers" could simply mean 'besiegers' (s.w. Is. 1:8; Ez. 6:12); or it could be a reference to the Angels who watch over God's word to perform it (Jer. 1:11-13), and who would bring the invaders on their journey, like Ezekiel's cherubim.

*Jeremiah 4:17 As keepers of a field, they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me', says Yahweh-* "They (the enemy) are lying in wait on the fields round about". This would support the translation

"besiegers" in :16. The rebellion of the people is specifically stated as being in their hearts (Jer. 5:23 s.w.). The state of the heart is such a repeated theme here.

*Jeremiah 4:18 Your way and your doings have brought these things to you. This is your wickedness; for it is bitter, for it reaches to your heart-* Their "way" refers to their way of thought and internal imagination, the trodden paths of mental reactions and thoughts, which led to their "doings".

Jeremiah speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart. And yet Jeremiah had the mind of God in this sense, as David was after God's own heart. This is reflected by the way in which it is very difficult at times in Jeremiah to decide who is speaking- Jeremiah, or God. Jer. 9:1-3,10,11 is a good passage to work through from this perspective, asking 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4).

*Jeremiah 4:19 My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I can't hold my peace; because you have heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war-* See on :18. Despite being betrayed and hated by his own people, Jeremiah felt such pain for the judgment to come upon them- he was still struck with pain at the thought of their judgment. If we too have a heart that bleeds, we will come to know the mind of Jeremiah, who as he proclaimed the judgments of his last days, interrupted his sermon with this outburst. His very *soul* heard the message which he preached, and he interrupts his proclamation of it with this emotional outburst; this was no mindless distribution of bills or casual mention of our church. He was pained in his heart to the extent that he seems to have had some form of seizure. This is how much Jeremiah felt for those he preached to and warned, both within and without of the ecclesia. And he speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart.

*Jeremiah 4:20 Destruction on destruction is cried; for the whole land is laid waste: suddenly are my tents destroyed, and my curtains in a moment-* In this whole section, it is hard to decide whether this is Jeremiah or Yahweh speaking in the first person. Jeremiah, as every true preacher, was no mere relayer of God's word. He was personally involved in the message, sharing the heart of God whilst also full of heartbreak for his own people- just like the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 4:21 How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet?-* Again we can question whether Jeremiah was correct in feeling that he didn't want to hear any more judgment to come upon his people. And yet despite this, the personal pronouns in the next verse clearly relate to God rather than Jeremiah. He shared the mind of God, whilst being also so terribly pained for his people- a fine insight into the Lord's mind.

*Jeremiah 4:22 For my people are foolish, they don't know me. They are foolish children, and they have no understanding. They are skilful in doing evil, but to do good they have no knowledge-* Clearly the "me" is God, and yet the surrounding context suggests Jeremiah is speaking. Again we see how the thinking and spirit of Yahweh was meshed with that of His servant and preacher. This is how our witness should be.

*Jeremiah 4:23 I saw the land and, behold, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light-* Clearly an allusion to the language of Genesis, supporting the idea that there we have a description of the formation of *eretz* Israel rather than the entire planet. The judgments were intended to bring the *eretz* back to what it was then; but implicit in this judgment is the expectation of new creation. See on :31.

*Jeremiah 4:24 I saw the mountains, and behold, they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth-* The vision before Jeremiah suggests that the land of Israel was to return to the state it was in when the creation process began.

*Jeremiah 4:25 I saw, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the sky had fled-* This would suggest that "no man" was to be left on the land. But this didn't happen at this time; only the leadership were taken captive, and soon after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, local Jews still came to worship at the temple site (Jer. 41:5). In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority.

*Jeremiah 4:26 I saw, and behold, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of Yahweh, before His fierce anger-* Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

*Jeremiah 4:27 For thus says Yahweh, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end-* Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

*Jeremiah 4:28 For this the land will mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and I have not relented, neither will I go back from it-* See on Hos. 13:14. God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6). There has to come a moment when the pull of the flow toward the waterfall of condemnation is now too strong, and the plunge is inevitable. It is that moment which perhaps we need to fear more than anything else in human experience. It happened to Israel- their hearts too were hard, and in the end, after a period, God have them over to their hard hearts (Ps. 81:11,12)- the implication being that even whilst He hardened their hearts, He kept them by grace from the full consequences... but in the end, the final inevitable drag towards the waterfall set in. This is why there were times when even repentance, as a change of mind, could not save Jerusalem from destruction (Jer. 4:28; 15:1-9; 16:12; Ez. 7:1-9). This was the moment *after* the inevitable tug towards the waterfall beings, but before the actual plunge. It's Saul cowering before the witch of Endor, lying face down in the dirt that fateful night... and *this* is the human condition we should most dread.

*Jeremiah 4:29 Every city flees for the noise of the horsemen and archers; they go into the thickets and climb up on the rocks: every city is forsaken, not a man dwells therein-* This was avoidable; if Judah had obeyed the commandment to flee their fenced cities and go into Jerusalem. See on :6. They refused God's peace and safety in Jerusalem, and so they fled into the rocks and thickets.

*Jeremiah 4:30 You, when you are made desolate, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with scarlet, though you deck you with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain do you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you, they seek your life-* The very nations whose help and blessing Judah had sought, and whose idols she had worshipped, were now coming to demand her life. Just as those idols had demanded the lives of her firstborn children, and she had given them. Now her life itself would be required by them.

Perhaps more than anything, the prophetic descriptions of condemnation were aimed at attacking the indifference which pervaded Israel. And so the power of sexual imagery is used to the full in the description of rejected Israel as a whore all dressed up with no place to go, so utterly unwanted and despised (Jer. 4:30,31). This was and is the tragedy of Divine rejection of those who have so desperately sought the approval of this world, when all too late they find this world is over for good. We so minimize sin. Just a bit of injustice, a little touch of selfishness, a moment of hypocrisy... but all this is obscene treatment of our God. We read the description of the red clothing, gaudy jewellery and heavy make up of the harlot Israel in Ezekiel and Jeremiah... and this is how inappropriate is mere external religion (Jer. 4:30). And we're all guilty of that, in some ways at some times.

*Jeremiah 4:31 For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, who gasps for breath, who spreads her hands saying, Woe is me now! For my soul faints before the murderers-* The imagery here pictures a woman who is dying in childbirth, but who will still produce a live birth. Just as the imagery of decreation has implicit within it the hope of new life, so here. Although the woman would die, the hope was that she would bring forth a new generation who would respond. The woman in travail is the woman of :30 who desperately dresses as a prostitute in order to placate her former lovers, when she realizes they have come to murder her. And she is in fact heavily pregnant, about to give birth with her murderers standing around her. This was the pathetic, awful picture of Judah's position. This kind of shocking imagery is deployed to try to shake them out of their indifference, as it should us too.

## Jeremiah Chapter 5

*Jeremiah 5:1 Run back and forth through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places of it, if you can find a man, if there are any who does justice, who seeks truth; and I will pardon her-* This reflected how God is in search of man. What joy therefore when He finds a man, and the man who is searching finds Him. This is the joy of the lost being found in the parables of Lk. 15. Jeremiah's search for believers was a reflection of God's. God hunts for us like a lion, Job came to realize; and in this "You show yourself wonderful to me" (Job 10:16). And we are searching for God. God is not indifferent to our searching for Him. Those awestruck moments of wonder, of radical amazement, are where God finds us at the time we are searching for Him. Both sides are seeking each other; and in those moments, they meet. As a Jewish poet put it: "And going out to meet thee / I found thee coming toward me". In those moments, heaven and earth kiss each other. There is a click, a flash, between Almighty God and us- as we stand at a bus stop, turn left into Acacia Avenue, lay there on our bed meditating.

Here is another allusion to the situation during the Assyrian invasion; see on Jer. 4:5,8. Hezekiah obtained forgiveness and acceptance for those who kept the Passover "otherwise than it was written"- thanks to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:18). In Hezekiah's time, all Israel had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation (Jer. 26:13,19). All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed judgment, after the pattern of Phinehas (or is this a reference to Messiah?).

"Seeks truth" can also be "is not greedy". Jeremiah speaks of running to and fro in the streets of Jerusalem, searching her squares, to see if he could find a single man who did justice and wasn't greedy (Jer. 5:1,5; 6:6,13; 8:10). Why get so ballistic because people are greedy and have no real sense of justice? Isn't that part of the human deal, don't we see it every single day? Yes we do. But the challenge of the prophets is to feel its' awfulness and realize that for this, an awful judgment is coming from God. It is indeed hard to see the world from God's perspective; but this is what the spirit of prophecy was and is all about.

We wonder whether there were really no other righteous in Jerusalem apart from Jeremiah. There was Josiah, but he died in disobedience to God's wishes, fighting against Egypt for Babylon. There was Baruch, but he seems to have had a heart for materialism (Jer. 45:5). Ezekiel was not in Jerusalem but already in captivity.

*Jeremiah 5:2 Though they say, 'As Yahweh lives;' surely they swear falsely-* Josiah's reformation had clearly not touched their hearts. The implication is that God's people swore that "Yahweh lives" but without moral justice and right behaviour. To believe that God exists is therefore to act like Him, in truth, justice and righteousness. To live otherwise is to effectively deny His existence. His very existence is therefore an imperative to live and be as He is.

*Jeremiah 5:3 O Yahweh, don't Your eyes look on truth? You have stricken them, but they were not grieved. You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They have refused to return-* Jeremiah had similar oscillations of feeling as God also had. This is his response to the command to go and search for even one man who did righteousness (:1). He is complaining that surely God sees the situation anyway, which he had to report- Israel had not grieved to repentance. And they were psychologically hardened against that possibility. But then in :4,5 his pity for them returns and he as it were tries again. We are hardened in our path, one way or the other. The Lord hardened His face like a rock (Is. 50:7; Lk. 9:51); and yet the wicked similarly harden their faces like a rock to go in the way of the flesh (Jer. 5:3). Jeremiah had his face hardened in response to his own hardening of face (Jer. 1:17; 5:3), and the wicked in Israel likewise were hardened (Jer. 3:3; 4:30)

*Jeremiah 5:4 Then I said, Surely these are poor. They are foolish; for they don't know the way of Yahweh, nor the law of their God-* See on :3. Jeremiah apparently relents from his giving up with the people in :3. He realizes that the people simply don't know God's way and law- because the priests, of whom he was one, had not taught them. "Poor" is better "lean"; skinny and foolish is the language of a misled flock. The priests had not led them as intended. Notice how "the law" is not a set of disconnected, discrete commandments and regulations; it was to inculcate a way of life and thought, "the way of Yahweh", with which here it is paralleled.

But "law" is better "judgment", as AV. Knowing God's present judgment should have a powerful practical effect upon us. If we know the judgment of God against certain types of behaviour, we will keep away from them totally. It is only the rejected who refuse to know "the judgment of their God" (Jer. 5:4 AV). We are living our lives under

judgment. Knowing God's judgment-principles, we will wish to separate from all that will finally be condemned and destroyed. Israel chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7).

*Jeremiah 5:5 I will go to the great men, and will speak to them; for they know the way of Yahweh, and the law of their God. But these with one accord have broken the yoke, and burst the bonds-* As so often, there is an intentional ambiguity as to the speaker. This is Jeremiah's response to the command to go and seek at least one man to stand in the gap; but by :7 we have God speaking. Again we see how Jeremiah's feelings and positions were so meshed with those of God; as should be with us, the Spirit of God had become part of his spirit. Jeremiah speaks as if he had expected that those amongst "the great men" would know Yahweh's law and way; but he is disappointed, he finds not a single one there ("all with one accord..."). Again we see Jeremiah's overly positive and hopeful view of Israel; which was also a reflection of God's view, so in love with them was He still. Breaking the bonds suggests they had broken their covenant relationship. Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God, but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

*Jeremiah 5:6 Therefore a lion out of the forest shall kill them, a wolf of the evenings shall destroy them, a leopard shall watch against their cities; everyone who goes out there shall be torn in pieces; because their transgressions are many, and their backsliding is increased-* Even in this expression of wrath, there is the implication that the people would still be safe within their cities [an intensive plural for the great singular city, of Jerusalem?] if they remained within it. As explained on Jer. 4:5,8, one of the many potential possibilities was that the cities would be destroyed apart from Jerusalem, and if they repentantly fled into Jerusalem they would be saved.

*Jeremiah 5:7 How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken Me, and sworn by what are no gods-* The tension within God is apparent. Hosea's the clearest on this. God wants nothing more to do with His adulterous people; and then He pleads with them to come back to Him, breaking His own law, that a put away woman can't return to her first husband. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?... mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together" (Hos. 11:8). And Jeremiah has more of the same: "How can I pardon you... shall I avenge myself on a nation such as this? Shall I not punish them for these things?" (Jer. 5:7-9,28,29). God reveals Himself as oscillating between punishing and redeeming, judging sin and overlooking it. God is open to changing His stated plans (e.g. to destroy Nineveh within forty days, to destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation). He isn't like the Allah of Islam, who conducts a monologue with his followers; the one true God of Israel earnestly seeks dialogue with His people, and as such He enters into all the contradictory feelings and internal debates which dialogue involves. 'God loves the sinner and hates the sin' has always seemed to me problematic, logically and practically. Love is in the end a personal thing; in the end love and hate are appropriate to persons, not abstractions. And the person can't so easily be separated from their actions. Ultimately, it is persons who will be saved or condemned. The prophets reveal both the wrath and love of God towards His people, in the same way as a parent or partner can feel both wrath and love towards their beloved.

*When I had fed them to the full, they committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the prostitutes' houses-* Here and in :8 there is continued the tragic theme that the more God blessed His people with material blessings, the more they went away from Him. This continues a major Biblical theme- that God's loving material blessings of His people led them to idolatry (Dt. 32:15). The prosperity Gospel must give due weight to this sad experience of God's people historically. Those blessings gave them a taste for materialism, which led them to madly seek more such blessings from anybody and anything which might immediately yield them. The prostitutes were representative of the various idols they served, although that service often involved sleeping with the cult prostitutes.

*Jeremiah 5:8 They were as fed horses roaming at large-* We all know the downward spiral into sin... how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female horse camel in insatiable heat (Jer. 2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God.

*Everyone neighed after his neighbour's wife-* Being unfaithful to their covenant with God led them to being unfaithful to their marital covenant. Our relationship with God is reflected in our family lives.

Our early morning thoughts are fair indicators of how we really are with God. Interestingly, Israel are criticized for their early morning attitudes- in the mornings (AV) they fantasized after their neighbours' wives (Jer. 5:8; Hos. 7:6), got up and wanted to get drunk again (Is. 5:11), had unjust thoughts about others (Jer. 21:12; Mic. 2:1). That's quite some emphasis- God was *so* unhappy with what His people thought about in the mornings. And Zeph. 3:7 is perhaps the most challenging of all- God condemned His people because they rose each morning and cast off all their opportunities (Heb.), despite Him every morning [potentially] revealing His word to them (Zeph. 3:5). They allowed themselves to be simply too busy to see all that God potentially enabled for them every single day. And what about us? God has prepared huge potential achievement for each of us- but we tend to fritter our days away in busyness and poor planning and lack of a self-disciplined life.

*Jeremiah 5:9 Shouldn't I punish them for these things? says Yahweh; and shouldn't My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*- God had been Israel's wife and was in love with her. His deep desire for avenging was therefore absolutely connected with His great love for her. There had to be response from Him. This rhetorical question, enquiring as to whether Yahweh should take vengeance on Israel, is thrice repeated in Jeremiah (Jer. 5:9,29; 9:9). The answer of course is "Yes, God would be justified in doing so". And that answer was perhaps the repentance which God sought in order to avert the coming of His judgment.

*Jeremiah 5:10 Go up on her walls, and destroy; but don't make a full end. Take away her branches; for they are not Yahweh's-* The destruction of the branches implied that the stock of the vine [a prophetic symbol for Israel] was to remain. This was another way of saying that a "full end" would be made, although Jeremiah was to walk around the walls of Jerusalem and prophecy their fall- the collapse of all human strength. See on :10. We see here the power of the prophetic word- Jeremiah uttering these prophecies was as good as the destruction happening, and he therefore was the vehicle through which it would happen. Realizing this may account for the psychological breakdown of Jeremiah we see in Lamentations. On Jer. 4:5,6 we saw that an earlier prophetic potential had been that Jerusalem would be saved, but the fortified cities of Judah would fall. Now it seems that possibility had been precluded by their impenitence, and so Jerusalem too would fall. This is how God works in our lives too, working out various prophetic potentials.

*Jeremiah 5:11 For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against Me, says Yahweh-* This was why Jerusalem was going to fall, and the plan for her survival as outlined on Jer. 4:5,6 was now cancelled. "Treachery" means literally to cover; they thought God would not notice, and this was the reason for His anger with them. And we can take a lesson from this. His omniscience requires from us a totally open attitude toward Him and ourselves.

*Jeremiah 5:12 They have denied Yahweh and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come on us; neither shall we see sword nor famine-* This was a denial of the very essence of Yahweh, "I am that I am"; and they said "It is not He", or "He is not". This was effectively atheism, although they would have hotly denied that charge. The damage of false teaching is that this is where it leads people; for it was the false prophets who taught that there would be no evil coming, and the predictions of sword and famine by Jeremiah and Ezekiel would not happen (:13). To deny God's word is therefore to deny Him, to say "He is not". For "the word was God", He is identified with His word, and our attitude to His word is our attitude to Him.

*Jeremiah 5:13 The prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them-* This appears to be a statement of the people and false prophets about Jeremiah and the faithful prophets (so :14 implies). "Spirit" and "wind" are the same word in Hebrew. They treated the spirit within Jeremiah as just air, a wind that would pass away. This is why God responds in :14 by saying that His word in Jeremiah would become a fire and not simply wind. Again there is the implication that it was Jeremiah's words which would bring the fire of destruction upon Jerusalem, and this accounts for Jeremiah's psychological breakdown in Lamentations when he views the results of that fire.

*Jeremiah 5:14 Therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it shall devour them-* See on :13. The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14;

17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to re-establish His Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 5:15 Behold, I will bring a nation on you from far, house of Israel, says Yahweh. It is a mighty nation. It is an ancient nation-* Babylon was "ancient" in that God had raised it up for this time and purpose. Whatever the geopolitical issues of the day, it was Yahweh who would bring this distant nation against Israel. We wonder why Babylon is not named at this point, whereas it clearly is in Jeremiah's later prophecies. Perhaps it was because these prophecies were still conditional; they were capable of fulfilment in peoples other than the Babylonians, had Judah at that time repented; although the judgment for their sins had to come at some point. But the channel of those judgments was still flexible, depending upon their repentance. See on Jer. 6:3.

*A nation whose language you don't know, nor understand what they say-* This was to be part of their judgment, and it is applied in 1 Cor. 14:21 to those in the church at Corinth who falsely claimed that speaking in unintelligible babble was the Spirit gift of speaking in foreign languages. This was in fact therefore a sign that the church was judging itself, acting as if they were the sinful Jews of Jeremiah's day whose judgment was to be dominated by those speaking a language they didn't understand.

*Jeremiah 5:16 Their quiver is an open tomb, they are all mighty men-* The idea was that every arrow in their quiver would bring death; but this was because the tongue of the Jews had been as deadly arrows (Jer. 9:8). They were "mighty men" in that they were the earthly representatives of the Angelic *elohim*, God's "mighty ones". Ezekiel makes the same point- the Angel cherubim chariots were to be the chariots of Babylon.

*Jeremiah 5:17 They shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and your daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds. They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees-* "Eat up" is used of how Babylon "consumed" Jerusalem with fire (Neh. 2:3,13 etc.). The people and their land were to be "consumed" by the fire which was contained in the words Jeremiah spoke (Jer. 5:14,17). But all who devoured / consumed them would be "held guilty" (Jer. 2:3; 10:25; 30:16). And yet in depression, Jeremiah lamented that the fire had consumed (Lam. 2:3; 4:11), when it was His own words which had been that devouring fire. His lament was therefore tantamount to a statement of regret that he had been used as the vehicle for this devouring fire.

*They shall beat down your fortified cities in which you trust with the sword-* There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant (Jer. 4:5-7). This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go into those other defenced cities (Jer. 8:14).

*Jeremiah 5:18 But even in those days, says Yahweh, I will not make a full end with you-* Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

*Jeremiah 5:19 It will happen, when you say, 'Why has Yahweh our God done all these things to us?' Then you shall say to them, 'Just like you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours'* - Jeremiah was commanded to prophecy this when the judgment happened. Perhaps he did, but Lamentations records him struggling with the "Why, God...?" questions, and concluding that it was all unreasonably severe judgment. He really is portrayed as a man in struggle with God, despite being of His mind and Spirit in so much.

*Jeremiah 5:20 Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah saying-* This was to go to all Judah and not just Jerusalem, as previous prophetic words.

*Jeremiah 5:21 'Hear now this, foolish people, and without understanding; who have eyes, and don't see; who have ears, and don't hear-* These words are quoted about the Jews in the Lord's day. But it is not to say that they were

incapable of hearing or seeing, for this is part of an appeal to hear and respond (:22). The idea is that they had the eyes to see, but wouldn't. It's like the appeal to break up their fallow ground (Jer. 4:3)- they were to use their potential. They were without understanding because they chose not to open their eyes and ears. Not understanding Divine teaching therefore has a moral basis to it; it's not mere intellectual failure, but is rooted in a deep psychological desire not to repent.

*Jeremiah 5:22 Don't you fear Me?* says Yahweh *'Won't you tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it can't pass it? and though its waves toss themselves, yet they can't prevail; though they roar, yet they can't pass over it'*- They refused to fear God and sense His presence because they were persuaded that they had done nothing wrong (:12). This is the narrative story that is endlessly repeated in the hearts of so many: 'I am a good person, I don't sin, the problem is with us, get off me and stop trying to make me feel my behaviour displeases God'. They had the potential to understand this (:21), but refused to live according to it. The reference to the sea and waves being limited as to their destructive effect is clearly a reference to the seas of the Gentile invaders; God had promised not to make a full end of Israel, and so the waves of the invaders would not be allowed to totally destroy the land / *eretz*. This was part of God's covenant with Israel, His "perpetual decree". It was this experience of grace which ought to have made Judah tremble at the presence of the God of such grace.

*Jeremiah 5:23 But this people has a revolting and a rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone-* Again the issue is with their heart; they were the stubborn and rebellious son of Dt. 21:18,20 (s.w.) who had to be slain. Their refusal to understand (:21) was not therefore a case of intellectual failure, but was rooted in a desire to revolt from the God who had so loved them and walk away ("gone") from Him. Jeremiah mourned Israel's lack of spiritual sensitivity and failure to live up to their potential- they had eyes, but didn't see, they were God's servant, but a blind one; His messenger, but unable to hear any message (Is. 42:19). So the prophets weren't satisfied just because a minority responded to their message of God's love. They were heartbroken because the majority rejected it. I suspect we tend to think that 1 response in 1000 is good, 1 in 10,000 isn't bad. But what about the other 999, or 9,999, who receive our tracts, hit our websites, hear our witness- and don't respond? Is our witness in the spirit of the prophets? Are we happy that the tiny minority respond, and don't spare a thought for the tragedy of the majority who don't? Not only their tragedy, but the tragedy for God?

*Jeremiah 5:24 Neither do they say in their heart, 'Let us now fear Yahweh our God who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season; who preserves to us the appointed weeks of the harvest'*- Yet again the emphasis is upon the heart. They failed to perceive that the rains in Palestine were arranged by God for the optimal times- just after sowing and just before harvesting, and then no rain during the harvesting season. Those "weeks of the harvest" were appointed by God for them. But they refused to "see" that (:21).

*Jeremiah 5:25 Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good from you-* The rains, so carefully designed to give them an optimal growing season and harvest (see on :24), were turned away from them because these were the blessings of the covenant which they had broken. The potential good that was planned would not come. This failure to realize potential is such a major theme of the prophets, and it can be seen in human life just as much today.

*Jeremiah 5:26 For among My people are found wicked men. They watch, as fowlers lie in wait. They set a trap. They catch men-* God had told Jeremiah at the start of his ministry that He would watch over His word to perform it; but in the false Israel, there were false prophets who likewise watched over the fulfilment of their evil plans. "Trap" is the same word used about the "mount of corruption" in Jerusalem which Josiah had destroyed (2 Kings 23:13). But his reforms were only tokenistic; the false prophets remained, setting up similar traps of corruption. It is the same word translated 'destruction', which the Babylonians would bring (Jer. 51:25; Ez. 5:16). But as the Babylonians would entrap Jerusalem in the siege, so they had in essence done to themselves already.

*Jeremiah 5:27 As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit. Therefore they became great and grew rich-* The bird traps featured live birds within them, encouraging other birds to fly in to the trap or cage. This is how advertising works- see how this wonderful thing happened to this person, so why not join them within the cage. The wealth of the false prophets attracted the people to act like them.

*Jeremiah 5:28 They have grown fat. They shine; yes, they excel in deeds of wickedness. They don't plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper; and they don't judge the right of the needy-* The "wicked men" of :26 were therefore the spiritual and civil leadership, and their wealth was gained through oppressing the poor. This was mentioned rather than their idolatry, because it is attitudes to the poor which are of such huge significance to God. The very same reasons are given by Ezekiel for the Babylonian judgment at this time (Ez. 22:29).

*Jeremiah 5:29 Shall I not punish for these things? says Yahweh. Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*- See on :9. The judgment was against the "nation", whereas :26-28 appear to condemn the ruling classes. God does not judge the righteous along with the wicked. The corruption of these men had spread throughout society; as noted on :27, they were a self-advertisement for getting wealth by abusing others, and all society were attracted to it. The abuse of the leadership was 'loved' by the people (:31).

*Jeremiah 5:30 An astonishing and horrible thing has happened in the land-* God was 'astonished' in that again, He limited His omniscience in order to enter fully into relationship with His people. He had higher hopes for His people, and is portrayed as shocked and shattered when those hopes were dashed. The false prophecies uttered in His Name and supported by His priests were particularly shocking to Him (:31).

*Jeremiah 5:31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own authority; and My people love to have it so-* The entire society was guilty because leaders only act as the people want; see on :29. The priests were to teach the people God's law, but the prophets who claimed to give God's word gave false words in His Name. Hence there was a conspiracy between prophets and priests. And yet all Israel were to be priests. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "Kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). Israel were all "saints", and yet saints and priests are paralleled in passages like Ps. 132:16. Israel in the wilderness had clothes which didn't wear out- just as the Priestly clothes didn't, and were handed down from generation to generation (so Ex. 29:29 implies). Israel were to teach every man his neighbour and brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11). God therefore saw all Israel as represented by the priests (Hos. 4:9; Is. 24:2; Jer. 5:31; 8:10).

*What will you do in the end of it?*- This is typical of the rhetorical questions in Jeremiah. They were designed to elicit an acceptance by the people that all this would come to an appropriate end in a dramatic destruction. And it was a recognition of this which was vital for repentance. All the time, God is seeking to elicit repentance- from people we would likely have given up with long before.

## Jeremiah Chapter 6

*Jeremiah 6:1 Flee for safety, you children of Benjamin, out of the midst of Jerusalem, blow the trumpet in Tekoa and raise up a signal on Beth Haccherem; for evil looks forth from the north, and a great destruction-* On Jer. 4:5,6 we saw that an earlier prophetic potential had been that Jerusalem would be saved, but the fortified cities of Judah would fall. Now it seems that possibility had been precluded by their impenitence, and so Jerusalem too would fall. This is how God works in our lives too, working out various prophetic potentials. Tekoa and Beth Haccherem were to the south of Jerusalem; the idea is that the invaders from the north would take Jerusalem and pursue its inhabitants further south.

The frequent predictions of judgment upon Israel were effectively calls to repentance, whereby the predicted judgment need not actually happen. The more Israel resisted the call, the more they were as it were tightening the bands which the prophetic word had laid around them: "Now therefore be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong; for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth" (Is. 28:22). Thus Jer. 6:2 appears to be a specific prophecy of future destruction in Jerusalem: "The comely and delicate one, the daughter of Zion, will I cut off" (RV). But the preceding verse is in fact a call for the "daughter of Zion" to "Flee for safety out of the midst of Jerusalem" (Jer. 6:1 RV). If they had obeyed that call, then the prophecy of cutting off wouldn't have come true. Note in passing that this is the basis for the Lord's command to flee out of Jerusalem in the "last days" of AD70 and before His return to earth. The prophecies of destruction within Jerusalem had [in AD70] and will yet have an element of conditionality about them. Hence the appeal of Jer. 6:8,26 to the "daughter of Zion" to "be instructed" and to mourn in repentance; if this had been done, in Jeremiah's time, in AD70 and if it will be done in our last days, so many prophecies of certain judgment will not in fact be fulfilled.

*Jeremiah 6:2 The comely and delicate one, the daughter of Zion, will I cut off-* See on :1. The translation could refer to good pastureland, which fits with :3. Or LXX: "And thy pride, O daughter of Sion, shall be taken away".

*Jeremiah 6:3 Shepherds with their flocks shall come to her; they shall pitch their tents against her all around; they shall feed each one in his place-* Again we note that "Babylon" is not mentioned here, and the idea of nomadic shepherds encamping around Jerusalem leads us to think that the nomadic Scythians are in view here. One prophetic potential was that had Judah repented, then the invasion of the Scythian tribes mentioned in Ez. 38 would have happened but would have been destroyed by Divine intervention, and then a repentant Judah would have built the temple system of Ez. 40-48. But this potential didn't come about. The Babylonians weren't characterized as shepherds, and yet they fulfilled the essence of the prophecy by besieging Jerusalem. See on Jer. 5:15.

*Jeremiah 6:4 Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon-* Attacks were usually made at dawn and not in the midday heat, but the invaders were to be so enthusiastic, having prepared / sanctified war against Jerusalem. This *jihad* is going to be seen in the last days, when these prophecies will come to their ultimate term.

*Woe to us! For the day declines, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out-* Here we see how Jeremiah totally identifies with the people he is teaching. In the midst of stating how the invaders would act and speak, he himself cries out "Woe to us!". He sees that the word he is preaching is absolutely true and will really happen. The day of opportunity for repentance is drawing to a close, although it is a long evening, stretching out a long time, because God really so sought their repentance before the night of the invasion came.

*Jeremiah 6:5 Arise, and let us go up by night, and let us destroy her palaces-* As noted on :4, Jeremiah is predicting the words of the invaders, although he himself interjects an outburst of "Woe unto us!" in :4. The "palaces" refer not only to the temple, but to the houses of the wealthy, built on exploitation of the poor (Jer. 5:28). The historical records in Jeremiah and 2 Chronicles stress that "the great houses" were destroyed.

*Jeremiah 6:6 For Yahweh of Armies said, Cut down trees, and cast up a mound against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her-* The invaders were under the direct command of Yahweh of Armies; their armies were His armies, reflecting the Angelic armies of heaven. Just as Ezekiel's cherubim were Angelic chariots, manifested in the chariots of Babylon. God commanded the invaders to cut down trees in order to make siege engines. This was specifically the opposite of how He had commanded Israel to make war (Dt.

20:19,20). We could draw the conclusion that what God expects of His people, He doesn't expect of the Gentile world; indeed He may expect the very opposite. This would suggest that it is inappropriate for Christians to demand that the secular world adopts exactly their positions.

*Jeremiah 6:7 As a well casts forth its waters, so she casts forth her wickedness: violence and destruction is heard in her; before Me continually is grief and woundedness-* The violence and destruction were what the Jews were doing to each other; and so violence and destruction came upon them. That judgment was merely a continuation of how they themselves acted. The continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in God's continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. The same word is used of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

*Jeremiah 6:8 Be instructed, Jerusalem-* The appeal for Jerusalem to be "instructed" uses the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.).

*Lest My soul depart from you; lest I make you a desolation, a land not inhabited-* See on :1,2. Here and Ez. 23:18 speaks of how God's soul "departed" from His people- but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It's as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God's. Never. The pain of God at Israel's sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): "Before me continually is grief and wounds" (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God's "soul" departed from them, because "the Lord has rejected you" (Jer. 6:8,30). This is the same language used about Saul- God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God's very soul / spirit is "with" us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

*Jeremiah 6:9 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like a vine-* The idea is that virtually no grapes would be left. And yet in fact the majority of the population, the working classes, were left in the land by the Babylonians. They had a policy of only taking the upper classes into captivity, and they did this with Judah. So here we see again God speaking in a wrath which He didn't completely fulfil.

*Turn again your hand as a grape gatherer into the baskets-* The idea seems to be as GNB: "So you must rescue everyone you can while there is still time". Perhaps the fact that not all were destroyed nor taken captive, as seems to be implied would happen, was because of the success of Jeremiah's ministry.

*Jeremiah 6:10 To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they can't listen. Behold, the word of Yahweh has become a reproach to them. They have no delight in it-* This would be Jeremiah somewhat rebellious response to the command in :9: "So you must rescue everyone you can while there is still time" (GNB). Jeremiah's response to this is that made by many believers today: 'But nobody's interested in repentance'. They had been asked to circumcise their hearts (Jer. 4:4), but Jeremiah considers that none have done so. And therefore, they would not listen, in the sense of responding. Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word is the basis for his comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy (Jer. 15:16). We might therefore detect there a sense of spiritual superiority over the Jews for whom God's word was not their joy.

*Jeremiah 6:11 Therefore I am full of the wrath of Yahweh. I am weary with holding in-* Seeing the world through the eyes of both God and man, Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of Yahweh", and yet he stood before God "to turn away thy wrath from them" (Jer. 18:20). Hence the huge psychological tension within the prophets. Like God Himself in Jer. 15:6, Jeremiah was "weary" of the stress and tension of continually threatening inevitable judgment and yet offering the utter grace of a way out of it. And so Jeremiah asks God to as it were be done with it, and pour out His anger.

*Pour it out on the youths in the street, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him who is full of days-* This did happen, in response to Jeremiah's request that it happen; and yet after the Babylonian invasion, he bitterly laments the suffering of young and old in Jerusalem in just the same language (Lam. 2:12,19,21; 5:14). The lesson is that what we pray for in depression and desperation, we may receive. And we should be therefore careful what we pray for.

*Jeremiah 6:12 Their houses shall be turned to others, their fields and their wives together; for I will stretch out My hand on the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh-* This is God's response to Jeremiah's request that God pour out His wrath and end the tension of threatening to do so but not doing it (:11). God likewise says in Jer. 15:6 that because He was weary with repenting, with changing His mind, He would "stretch out My hand" in judgment, using the same phrase found here.

*Jeremiah 6:13 For from their least even to their greatest, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely-* That all of society was guilty is a major theme of the prophets. They were attracted by the idea of immediate wealth, they coveted this, and therefore turned to idols which offered this. Hence covetousness is here paralleled with dealing falsely, which is what they were doing by proclaiming faithfulness to Yahweh whilst serving other gods.

*Jeremiah 6:14 They have healed also the hurt of My people superficially, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace-* There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "lightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedalled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 6:15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush-* We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20). Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God. Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

*Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, says Yahweh-* The allusion is to falling down before idols. By doing so they were living out how they were to fall before the nations of those idols. They would be cast down by God, but they had cast themselves down. Sin is its own condemnation.

*Jeremiah 6:16 Thus says Yahweh, Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, 'Where is the good way?' and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it'-* The "old" paths are literally 'the paths of *olahm*', the ways of eternity, the way that will lead to eternal life. This is the real sense of the phrase; it has been much misused by those whose native conservatism leads them to imagine that the old ways of their denomination must be correct and worthy of defence, just because the phrase "old paths" occurs in the Bible. But this is a mistranslation. Out of all the ways before Israel suggested by the various idols, they were to choose the paths [or perhaps it can be read as an intensive plural, the one great path, referred to by the people as "it"] that leads to eternity. The ways of the idols led at very best only to temporary betterment.

*Jeremiah 6:17 I set watchmen over you saying, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!'. But they said, 'We will not listen!'*- The rejection of Jeremiah was in line with the repeated rejection of the earlier prophets / watchmen. It's unlikely that they actually said "We will not listen", but God counts attitudes for what they effectively are, and imputes such statements to men as this is what their attitudes are effectively saying. And it is by such words that we shall be judged, and saved or condemned.

*Jeremiah 6:18 Therefore hear, you nations, and know, congregation, what is among them-* The appeal to God's people is parallel with an appeal to the Gentile nations. It was the Divine intention that His people would repent along with the surrounding Gentile nations, and all come together in a revived Kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic king.

*Jeremiah 6:19 Hear, earth! Behold, I will bring evil on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not listened to My words; and as for My law, they have rejected it-* As noted on :17, the people never formally rejected God's law and words (:20), but this was effectively their attitude, and so these words and positions were counted to them. This was what their thoughts implied; and we note the judgment of thoughts as being of primary importance to God.

*Jeremiah 6:20 To what purpose comes there to Me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to Me-* They had "rejected" God's law (:19) but still were obedient to parts of it. This is typical of where form becomes more important than content in the lives of religious people. The culture becomes the religion. Israel mixed Yahweh worship with that of the idols, hence the offerings were of materials from "a far country"; Babylon is probably in view.

Like many of the surrounding peoples, the Jews were sure that because they had a temple, because they offered sacrifice to their God and went through required rituals, therefore they were OK. The prophets exposed all this as scandalous pretension, revealing Israel's cherished beliefs and suppositions about these things as meaningless and false. Their surrounding world taught that if you offered sacrifice to your god, all went smoothly. And yet Jeremiah blasts them: "To what purpose does frankincense come [up] to me... your burnt offerings are not acceptable" (Jer. 6:20).

*Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people. The fathers and the sons together shall stumble against them. The neighbour and his friend shall perish-* God confirms men in the way in which they choose to go. He can deceive those who don't have the love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10), and so here He would lay stumbling blocks. Ezekiel was prophesying at about the same time to the same people, although from Babylon. He too mentions this feature of God laying stumbling blocks before the wicked, although he says that the prophets gave such people warning (Ez. 3:20). But they had in fact themselves laid the stumbling blocks of their idolatry within their hearts (Ez. 14:3). So here God is only psychologically confirming them in what they had themselves chosen. He works directly on human hearts, through "an evil spirit from the Lord" as with Saul, or positively through the transforming of His Holy Spirit. This theme is continued in :22.

*Jeremiah 6:22 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, a people comes from the north country. A great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth-* Whoever the invaders refer to, be it Babylon or the Scythians (see on Jer. 5:15; 6:3), they were from the very borders of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, which is "the earth" in view. They were "stirred up" in the same way as the spirit of Cyrus was later stirred up (s.w. Ezra 1:1). As noted on :21, God works directly upon human hearts, placing ideas and desires within the human psyche. Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade, so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability.

*Jeremiah 6:23 They take hold of bow and spear. They are cruel, and have no mercy. Their voice roars like the sea, and they ride on horses, each one set in array, as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Zion-* The present tense is used although the events were still future; they were that certain of coming true, because God's word is sure. This is the language of the Assyrian invasion in Hezekiah's time, and I suggested on Jer. 4:5,8 ; 5:1 that the events in

Judah at that time are often alluded to in Jeremiah. There was still the possibility that at the last moment, salvation by grace would be revealed in Jerusalem. But Is. 17:12,13 had said that the great rushing of the attackers like the waves was going to be turned back. There was still that potential.

*Jeremiah 6:24 We have heard its report; our hands become feeble; anguish has taken hold of us, pains as of a woman in labour-* The audience of Jeremiah generally rejected his message, insisting that no evil was going to come (Jer. 5:12). So the "we" refers to Jeremiah and the minority who repented. They were in labour, to bring forth the new Zion, the envisaged reborn community of Israel. In Micah, the daughter of Zion was to be in labour pangs (symbolic of their troubles in the 70 years captivity), and then give birth to a new nation as a result of this (Mic. 4:9,10), as well as her Messiah (Mic. 5:2), who would lead Judah in destroying Babylon (Mic. 4:13; 5:5-8). But Judah didn't want to destroy Babylon. Most of them preferred to carry on living there. So, no Messiah. At that time. Another different sequence of prophetic fulfilment had to develop. But this potential was there even before the Babylonian invasion.

*Jeremiah 6:25 Don't go forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy and terror are on every side-* This is a warning from Jeremiah; those who believed no evil would come would have disbelieved him (Jer. 5:12), and perished as a result. It's rather like the Olivet Prophecy to flee to the mountains.

*Jeremiah 6:26 Daughter of My people, clothe yourself with sackcloth, and wallow in ashes! Mourn, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the destroyer shall suddenly come upon us-* Jeremiah again appeals for repentance, to believe that death would come and so to mourn *as if* they had received their punishment. See on :1,2. The Canaanite tribes spoke of how their gods were married to their *land* and would defend it. But the prophets, especially Hosea, reveal Yahweh as married to His *people*. "Thus says the Lord, O my dear people [*bath 'ami-* as if they are God's partner]... make mourning... for suddenly the destroyer will come upon *us*" (Jer. 6:22,26). God delicately speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife. "The destroyer will come upon *us*" even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be 'destroyed' in Israel's destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love.

*Jeremiah 6:27 I have made you a tester of metals and a fortress among My people; that you may know and try their way-* This doesn't mean that Jeremiah decided who was the faithful, the true metal, by testing their way. Rather, the word of God which he preached was a test of the people, and their response to it revealed "their way". Thereby it was God who tried the way of His people (s.w. Jer. 17:10). Those who responded positively would find Jeremiah and his words to be a fortress, and could save themselves thereby.

Not only in our own self-examination should there be unity between our judgment and that of the Father; Jeremiah was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them. And further; if we know the judgments of God, then we will be more strongly motivated in our preaching and pastoral work, to pull men out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 23).

*Jeremiah 6:28 They are all grievous rebels, going about with slanders; they are brass and iron: they all of them deal corruptly-* This may be Jeremiah's response to the command to use God's prophetic word to refine the people. He reports that the people are corrupted brass and iron, their encounter with God's prophetic word had not refined them. They were epitomized by slander. This could refer to the false prophecies they believed which slandered God. But it seems more natural to take this as meaning that slander was their characteristic sin. Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder in Ez. 22:9. And so there are passages in Jeremiah which describe slander and gossiping as being the reason why God condemned Judah (Jer. 6:28; 9:3-8). The soap operas of the world are full of this kind of gossip and intrigue; they glorify it. And the more we feed ourselves with these things, the more likely we will be to see gossip as just part of life. And yet let's not mistake the words of the prophets; it is seen as murder, because effectively it puts to death a man's relationship with his fellows. God *hates* the man who sows such discord among brethren through gossip in the church (Prov. 6:19). "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22). That casual remark, that passing on of information under the guise of 'concern'- it was a body blow to the one you gossiped about, a blow so hard that it caused deep internal damage.

*Jeremiah 6:29 The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed of the fire: in vain do they go on refining; for the wicked are not plucked away-* This is the tragedy of Israel throughout their history, just as it is the tragedy of so many life histories. Terrible sufferings have been experienced, but still repentance and transformation has not been elicited. The fire was so intense that the lead itself was burned up by it, without achieving the desired cleansing. And the bellows, according to the AV, were also burned. Babylon themselves would be destroyed.

*Jeremiah 6:30 Men will call them rejected silver, because Yahweh has rejected them-* The idea is that "men", the inhabitants of the earth, will come to see Yahweh's judgments from His perspective. "Rejected" is the same word translated "rejected" in Jer. 6:19 where Israel rejected God's word. Their response to that word was therefore their judgment, and the refining fire upon them. It is also translated "despised", and Judah had despised the covenant and word of God (Lev. 26:15,43,44 s.w.). But as those verses in Leviticus bring out, although Israel rejected / despised God, He would not "for all that" reject / despise them eternally. This is the great paradox of God's grace to Israel, which serves as eternal encouragement to His sinful people of all ages. He does not actually operate a *measure for measure* policy, of treating His people as they treat Him; although this is not to say that He will not judge them. That generation were "rejected" (Jer. 7:29), but that is not to say that there was no hope for their future acceptance; the rejection by God was not eternal.

## Jeremiah Chapter 7

*Jeremiah 7:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* This appears to be parallel to the incidents of Jer. 26, as Jeremiah's prophecies and events in his life aren't at all chronological within the book of Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 7:2 Stand in the gate of Yahweh's house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of Yahweh, all you of Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship Yahweh-* This was probably not one of the outer gates, but one of the three gates which led from the inner court to the outer. Probably it was the gate where Baruch later recited the prophecies of Jeremiah, called "the new gate of the Lord's house", located in the "upper" i.e. inner court (Jer. 36:10 cp. 26:10). Probably the time was one of the three great feasts, when the people of Judah would have come up to the temple.

*Jeremiah 7:3 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place-* Jeremiah especially reveals the grace which God was so eager to show to the exiles. Jer. 7:3-7 made it clear that Judah's return to the land was to be conditional upon them not oppressing the poor- only "then will I cause you to dwell in this place" (AV). Yet in His grace and zeal for His people, it seems God overlooked that condition- for the returned exiles *did* oppress (Neh. 5:1-5), and yet they returned to the land. And yet they would've dwelt in Zion "for ever and ever" (Jer. 7:7) if they had not been abusive to others and truly loved God.

*Jeremiah 7:4 Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, are these-* Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him (Jer. 7:18,19; 11:17,18; 25:6; 44:3-8)- whereas the onlooker would've likely commented that at least they were doing *something*, and Jeremiah should just calm himself down about it all. He uses a grating sarcasm in Jer. 7:21-23: "Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh... I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings...but this command I gave them: Obey my voice". The people loved their temple: "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord...", they said. And Jeremiah responds: "You trust in deceptive words to no avail" (Jer. 7:4,8). And time and again, the prophets predicted the destruction of the temple by the God of Israel. This was radical stuff in those days; the idea was that the survival of a god depended upon the survival of his temple or shrine. No pagan god would threaten to destroy his own shrine. Israel's God was so different.

*Jeremiah 7:5 For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbour-* Perhaps their "ways" refer to the well trodden ways and paths of thought within the mind, reflected in "doings". "Amend" is the word used of how Cain was bidden "do well", to amend his ways, and a sin offering was even provided for him (Gen. 4:7). Hereby Israel are set up as Cain, a parallel which the Lord (Jn. 8:44) and New Testament writers also perceive. Judah had "trimmed" or "amended" their ways to seek relationships with the surrounding nations (Jer. 2:33 s.w.), willing to accept their gods and whatever cult obligations to them which were required. But they would not amend their ways for Yahweh. "Amend" is the word translated 'to do well' in Jer. 7:23. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

*Jeremiah 7:6 If you don't oppress the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, and don't shed innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt-* Because they oppressed Gentiles, therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33; Jer. 50:33 s.w.). Their judgments were appropriate to their sins. Innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. This is in proximity to the description of that temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), and these two ideas are found in Ez. 18:10: "If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things". These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. These actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" or oppressors (Jer. 7:11). Jeremiah as a priest is

addressing the leaders of the priests. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by some, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38).

*Jeremiah 7:7 Then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old even for evermore-* The whole exile and return need never have happened- the prophecies of this need not have come true in the way they did, for even before the Babylonian invasion, Judah had been offered the prospect of eternally remaining in their land, if they repented. And after it happened, Jeremiah commented: "Your prophets... did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity" (Lam. 2:14 NIV). It could have been 'warded off' by the peoples' repentance. Note how Jeremiah, himself a prophet at the time, so wishes to take the blame upon himself for not pleading more powerfully with the people. Perhaps we will have similar feelings when the time of tribulation breaks forth in the very last days.

*Jeremiah 7:8 Behold, you trust in lying words, that can't profit-* The attraction to them of the false prophets was that they offered "profit". It was materialism and a chronic coveting of instant wealth which led them to idolatry, which the prophets taught. This was because those idols were fertility cults offering good harvests and prosperity in return for worshipping them. It was idolatry which "can't profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Is. 44:9,10; Jer. 2:8), and this was what the "lying words" were all about.

*Jeremiah 7:9 Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known-* This was the behaviour inculcated by the false prophets of :8. They "walked after" gods they did not "know", in the Hebraic sense of having a relationship with. Idols don't have relationships with people; they are worshipped in the minds of the idolaters. Yahweh alone has real, legitimate two way relationship with His people.

*Jeremiah 7:10 And come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are saved; so that you may do all these abominations?-* The lack of conscience and shamelessness of the people is quite a theme in Jeremiah. They thought that their connection with Yahweh and the temple was some kind of 'once saved always saved' position which meant they could not really sin. This led them to what appears terrible hypocrisy; doing the things of :9 and then coming into the temple to proclaim their innocence. Indeed it seems Judah purposefully committed their worst sacrilege in the temple on the Sabbath, "in the same day" (Ez. 23:38). The child sacrifices of Ez. 23:39 were committed on the Sabbath. They had justified their perversions by claiming that they were in fact a form of Yahweh worship. That was the only way their consciences could be numbed to do as they did. This is the scenario of Jer. 7:7-10; they offered their children in nearby Gehenna and then came into the temple, reasoning that they were "delivered", saved from Egypt and from threatened judgment, in order to be able to sin without conscience. This was the Old Testament form of continuing in sin because grace abounded (Rom. 6:1).

*Jeremiah 7:11 Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says Yahweh-* A robbers' "den" is a place where they retreat in safety, certain that in their den they are safe from prosecution or the judgment of those they had stolen from. This is what they considered the temple to be. But there was no special, holy place which of itself provided a literal space which shielded from the eyes of Yahweh's judgment. Their holy concept of sacred space, and protection within it, was a false teaching from their prophets.

*Jeremiah 7:12 But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first-* Commonly enough, the New Testament speaks of baptism as a calling upon the Name of the Lord. This must be understood against its Hebrew background- *qara' beshem Yahweh*, which originally referred to approaching God in sacrifice (Gen. 12:7,8; Ps. 116:4,17). God placed His Name upon places in order to make them suitable places for sacrifice to be offered to Him (Dt. 12:4-7,21; Jer. 7:12). Baptism was thus seen as a sacrificial commitment to Yahweh in solemn covenant.

*And see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel-* This reminder is in the context of :11, where we saw

that Israel considered the temple a sacred space which somehow automatically preserved them from any prosecution for their sins. And so they were reminded that God doesn't operate sacred spaces like that. God's earlier sacred space in Shiloh had been destroyed because of the wickedness of the people, and the Jerusalem temple was not going to be any different. If the people had taken a more Biblical approach, they would have realized that the Scriptures spoke of God's people being taken captive out of their land; the existence of the temple was not going to save them from that.

*Jeremiah 7:13 Now, because you have done all these works, says Yahweh, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you didn't hear; and I called you, but you didn't answer-* Several times God speaks of His rising up early in the morning through the ministry of the prophets, every single day since Israel left Egypt (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25). The figure is stressed- God Himself rose up early every day to teach and appeal to His people (Jer. 32:33). Alarm clocks have changed our appreciation of this. Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries...

*Jeremiah 7:14 Therefore thus will I do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh-* Trust in the physical temple as a place of salvation and automatic shielding from God's judgment is seen today, in that religious people tend to trust in the external structures and symbols of their religion. This is the problem with religion; and human beings are wired with a tendency toward such external religion. The way of Yahweh is the way of the heart, of the Spirit; and external religion militates against this. Their "trust" was in the external form of their religion rather than the essential content- which should have been Yahweh. This "trust" was in the lying words of the prophets who taught this false idea about Jerusalem (:4,8).

*Jeremiah 7:15 I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, even the whole seed of Ephraim-* As pointed out to them earlier, the fate of the ten tribes was to be theirs. They considered God's "sight" or presence (s.w.) to be uniquely in the Jerusalem temple. This was not in fact the case, but for the sake of getting through to them, God accepts this for a moment to be true (as the NT language of demons does); and says that in any case, they will be cast out of Jerusalem and His presence in Zion. Ezekiel puts it another way, in saying that God's presence would depart, and the visions of the cherubim departing put that in visual terms. Here, God says that they will be cast out of His presence, even assuming that presence remained in Zion.

*Jeremiah 7:16 Therefore don't pray for this people, neither lift up a cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you-* Perhaps God was purposefully alluding to how Abraham's intercession saved Lot out of Sodom. But in this case, therefore, the sins of Jerusalem were worse than those of Sodom, and this precluded the power of such intercession. See on :27. For the sake of our prayers, *in some cases* sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel at this time up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Jeremiah and Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

The new Testament references to intercession never suggest that the Lord Jesus Christ intercedes in the sense of offering our prayers to God. "Intercession" can be read as another way of describing prayer; this is how the term is invariably used (Jer. 7:16; 27:18; Rom. 11:2; 1 Tim. 2:1). Thus when Jeremiah is told not to intercede for Israel, this meant he was not to pray for them; it does not imply that he was acting as a priest to offer Israel's prayers to God. Nowhere in the Bible is the idea floated that a man can offer another man's prayers to God and thereby make them acceptable. The Greek for "intercession" essentially means to meet a person; prayer / intercession is a meeting with God. There is evidently nothing morally impossible about a man having direct contact with God in prayer without

any priest or 'mediator'; the Old Testament abounds with such examples. The fact we are called upon to make intercession for others is surely conclusive proof that "intercession" means prayer, not relaying the words of another to God (1 Tim. 2:1). This meaning of intercession needs to be borne in mind when we consider its occurrences in Rom. 8. There we are taught that we know not what to pray for as we ought; the Lord Jesus makes intercession for us- i.e. He prays for us- not with words, i.e. not transferring our human words into God's language, not shuttling to and from between us and God as it were, but with His own groanings of the spirit. We don't know how to pray, so Christ prays (intercedes, in the language of Rom. 8) for us.

And yet Jeremiah did pray for the people. We see here the degree to which he recognized that God was and is open to dialogue with man. Perhaps he recalled how God had asked Moses not to intercede with Him not to destroy Israel ("now therefore let Me alone...", Ex. 32:10); and yet Moses had continued interceding and God changed His plan. But now, that was not possible. An end had to come.

*Jeremiah 7:17 Don't you see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?-* The implication could be that Jeremiah was too slow to perceive exactly how wicked the people were. The sins on the streets of Jerusalem were having idols on every street and naming every street after an idol, just as was done in Babylon.

*Jeremiah 7:18 The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger-* Again we see that the whole of society, including women and children, were implicated in the idolatry. They would not have considered that they were intentionally doing this to provoke Yahweh to anger, but this is how He read it. For God as it were imputes to our actions their real implications, both positively and negatively.

"The queen of heaven" was a Babylonian fertility god, otherwise called Ishtar, shaped like the moon or the planet Venus. It was the god of female fertility, hence the note that the women and children were a large part of its worship. Each female devotee was expected to sleep with the male cult prostitutes of this cult. And then sacrifice one of their children to it. No wonder this so upset God, seeing that He was the source of Israel's fertility, and their children were born to Him and not to the supposed queen of heaven. The women later protested that they were impenitent of this worship of the queen of heaven, and they did so with the full blessing of their husbands; this was significant, seeing that the cult involved sleeping with other men and offering their children to Ishtar (Jer. 44:19). See on :22.

*Jeremiah 7:19 Do they provoke Me to anger? says Yahweh. Don't they provoke themselves, to the confusion of their own faces?-* So the theme is repeated- that sin is its own judgment, and they were sinning against their own souls as well as against God. This 'confusion of face' is a term used by both Ezra and Daniel in their prayers, counting themselves amongst those who had suffered this judgment, even though they had not committed the sins of :18 (Ezra 9:7; Dan. 9:7,8). This is a powerful example of how the righteous do not separate themselves from the wicked but consider themselves united in sharing the same judgment; just as the righteous Lord Jesus did for us in tasting death for every man.

*Jeremiah 7:20 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, My anger and My wrath shall be poured out on this place, on man, and on animal, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched-* At the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication was that the wrath could be quenched still (Jer. 4:4); but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

*Jeremiah 7:21 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat meat-* As with Saul, God can send "an evil spirit from the Lord" to confirm men in their evil way, and also conversely the Holy Spirit to confirm those who wish to be spiritual in their way. This is why we are to pray "Lead us not into temptation", for God can encourage sinners in their way as He does here. And so Israel went backward and not forward, they were confirmed in their backward path (:24).

*Jeremiah 7:22 For I didn't speak to your fathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices-* God *did* command sacrifices; but He *not so much* commanded them *as* required Israel's spirit of obedience and acceptance of Him. "Not A... not B" is a construction found in Hebrew and other languages which means 'Not so much A, but actually more importantly B'. The sacrifices to the idols in :18 were therefore being performed in the name of Yahweh worship. This explains how shameless Israel were in their idolatry. They had convinced themselves that the false teachings from the false prophets were correct, and therefore they could worship Yahweh through idolatry. And this is an abiding temptation throughout all the generations of God's people.

*Jeremiah 7:23 But this thing I commanded them, saying, Listen to My voice, and I will be Your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in all the way that I command you-* As explained on :22, the requirement for burnt offerings was not God's essential desire. He wished for obedience and relationship with Him far more than technical obedience; the laws about offerings were to elicit and strengthen that essentially personal relationship between God and individual people. It was quite possible to perform the religious side of Yahweh worship without any personal sense of obedience to His word and relationship with Him. And we all have within us the poles of religion on one side, and spirituality on the other. They were completely on the religious pole, and lacked any real spirituality.

*That it may be well with you-* "Amend" in :5 is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

*Jeremiah 7:24 But they didn't listen nor turn their ear, but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart- And went backward, and not forward-* The "counsel" or advice / teaching they were following was that of the false prophets (:22). But actually those "counsels" were from their own evil minds. The false teachers were teaching them what they knew the mass of the people subconsciously wanted to hear. It is a feature of human nature that we can even subconsciously perceive what the 'other' or our audience wants us to say and teach- and to do and say what they want. Hence the weak Christians of the first century heaped to themselves teachers who taught them what they subconsciously wanted to hear, repeating to them what "their own lusts" wanted (2 Tim. 4:3).

*And went backward, and not forward-* As explained on :21, Israel went backward and not forward, in that they were confirmed in their backward path.

*Jeremiah 7:25 Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them-* See on Jer. 23:18,22. God reminds Israel that "day after day", ever since they left Egypt, He had *consistently* and *persistently* sent His prophets to them- there was never a day when a prophet wasn't active (Jer. 7:25; 11:7; 25:4; 26:15; 29:19; Am. 3:7; 2:12). And yet obviously we only have the written record of a few of those prophets. It would seem from this that there were prophets apart from Moses who appealed to Israel in the wilderness to repent of their ways.

*Jeremiah 7:26 Yet they didn't listen to Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Jeremiah 7:27 You shall speak all these words to them; but they will not listen to you: you shall also call to them; but they will not answer you-* Jeremiah like Ezekiel (Ez. 3:7) was told that Israel wouldn't hear him, but still he pleaded with them to hear (Jer. 9:20; 10:1; 11:6; 16:12; 17:24; 38:15); just as he was told not to pray for them, but he kept praying. This reflected God's hope was that perhaps they would hearken (Jer. 26:3) although He had foretold they wouldn't. Jeremiah was told not to pray for Israel (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11) and yet he did (Jer. 14:20; 42:2,4). And in similar vein, knowing the destruction that would come on all except Noah, God waited in the hope

that more would be saved. He as it were hoped against His own foreknowledge that more would be saved (1 Pet. 3:20).

*Jeremiah 7:28 You shall tell them, This is the nation that has not listened to the voice of Yahweh their God, nor received instruction-* The instruction given and refused was the previous incursions of Judah's enemies and the drought God had brought upon them (Jer. 2:30; Zeph. 3:7).

*Truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth-* "Truth" is a term often used about covenant relationship. The greatest truth is not some intellectually correct analysis of Bible verses, but of real covenant relationship with God. But they had rejected this, and so God had rejected them (:29). "Truth" in the sense of intellectually correct understanding cannot "perish", nor has it done so over the generations in that some have always understood correctly. God doesn't need His truth in that sense to be defended. But truth in the sense of covenant relationship can perish from those who once held it, and that is the paramount concern.

*Jeremiah 7:29 Cut off your hair and throw it away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights-* The AV adds "Cut off your hair, O Jerusalem". They had thrown away their glory, their God, and so they were invited to throw away their natural glory (1 Cor. 11:15). And for a woman to have a shaved head was a sign of her shame. They were being told to do this to themselves, because spiritually that was what they had done. The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman... that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem was to cut her own hair off here in Jer. 7:29). Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

*For Yahweh has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath-* "Rejected" is the same word translated "rejected" in Jer. 6:19 where Israel rejected God's word. Their response to that word was therefore their judgment, and the refining fire upon them. It is also translated "despised", and Judah had despised the covenant and word of God (Lev. 26:15,43,44 s.w.). But as those verses in Leviticus bring out, although Israel rejected / despised God, He would not "for all that" reject / despise them eternally. This is the great paradox of God's grace to Israel, which serves as eternal encouragement to His sinful people of all ages. He does not actually operate a *measure for measure* policy, of treating His people as they treat Him; although this is not to say that He will not judge them. That generation were "rejected", but that is not to say that there was no hope for their future acceptance; the rejection by God was not eternal.

*Jeremiah 7:30 For the children of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, says Yahweh: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name-* The only way their conscience allowed them to do this was because they absolutely convinced themselves that their idolatry was part of their worship of Yahweh. People can believe very strongly in what they want to believe in, and we see here a deep level of faith in their idea that they could serve Yahweh by serving idols. People believe in what they want to believe in. This is where Biblical faith is so different- we are asked to believe in God's word, in His realities and perspectives, which are not what we intuitively would want to believe in of ourselves.

*To defile it-* The temple was to be defiled by the Babylonians, but as with all judgments, this was but an extension of what they themselves had done.

*Jeremiah 7:31 They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I didn't command, nor did it come into My mind-* As noted on :30, they did these things because they had persuaded themselves that their idolatry was a form of Yahweh worship. Hence God insists that He had *not* commanded this, it was *not* in His mind that they should do this- whereas it seems the false prophets and the priests were teaching that actually this *was* commanded by God.

*Jeremiah 7:32 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to*

*bury-* Where they had offered their own children, they would also be slain. Again, their judgment was appropriate to their sins. A valley full of bodies is the basis for the dry bones in a valley prophecy of Ez. 37. Out of this awful apostasy and its judgment there could come revival. Such was and is the power of God's Spirit. Remember that Ezekiel was contemporary with Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 7:33 The dead bodies of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and for the animals of the earth; and none shall frighten them away-* Lack of burial was the ultimate shame within their culture, and so their judgments were appropriate to their own self understandings. We recall how when God made His unilateral covenant with Abraham in Gen. 15, the birds of prey were frightened away. This may be implying therefore that the covenant relationship was now broken.

*Jeremiah 7:34 Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste-* The streets of Jerusalem have previously been mentioned (:17) in the context of their being the scene of idolatry, with each street named after a god, just as in Babylon. The mirth and gladness was therefore in their idol rituals. It was this which led to the land becoming "waste", the phrase used about the result of breaking covenant relationship with Yahweh (Lev. 26:31,33).

## Jeremiah Chapter 8

*Jeremiah 8:1 At that time, says Yahweh, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves-* The valley of dry bones vision in Ez. 37 depicted Israel in captivity as bones waiting to come together and return to the land as a great army. We noted on Jer. 7:32 that this vision was as it were being set up by the picture of Israel's bodies being left in a valley unburied. Jer. 8:1 and other passages in Ezekiel (Ez. 6:5; 24:4) had described both Judah and Israel as dry bones. The feeling of those bones was that "our bones are dried and our hope is lost" (Ez. 37:11). Judah in captivity felt that they had no "hope", that God had cast them off, and that they were unable to have a full relationship with Him outside the land. However, it seems that this was a rather convenient piece of theology for them- they were doing well in Babylon, and despite the opportunity to return to the land, they largely chose to remain in Babylon.

But instead of allowing this revival to happen, instead the people would superstitiously use those dry bones in order to desperately appeal to their false gods to respond (:2). The revival of Ez. 37 was therefore precluded by Judah at the time; that is the point of the connection. But it will ultimately come true in the last days.

*Jeremiah 8:2 And they shall spread them before the sun, the moon and all the army of the sky which they have loved, and which they have served, and after which they have walked, and which they have sought, and which they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried, they shall be for dung on the surface of the earth-* See on :1. They were so devoted to their idolatry that even when their leadership were slain, they would use the bones to implore their idols to still save them. They would not be reformed even by the experience of national condemnation. "Walked... sought... worshipped... served" are all terms used of how they ought to have served Yahweh. "They shall not be gathered" stands in tension with the repeated prophecies that judged Judah would then be gathered. They could have been, there could have been a restored Kingdom of God in Judah, but they precluded its fulfilment at that time by refusing to be gathered.

*Jeremiah 8:3 Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue that remain of this evil family, that remain in all the places where I have driven them, says Yahweh of Armies-* I suggested on :1 that Ezekiel's prophecy of the revived dry bones could have been fulfilled, but instead of allowing the Spirit of new life to enter them, Judah preferred death to life. They used the dead bones to desperately implore the help of their idols. And this would be done by the exiles, who were driven into exile in "all places". Ezekiel's ministry was specifically to those exiles, and yet he was up against the fact that it was here prophesied that the exiles would preclude the fulfilment of the prophecies of life, and choose death instead.

*Jeremiah 8:4 Moreover you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Shall men fall, and not rise up again? Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return?-* As explained on :1-3, they could have been revived from those dead bones. Men who take a wrong turning do eventually retrace their steps. But these would not (:5). Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land (Jer. 15:19); if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

*Jeremiah 8:5 Why then is this people of Jerusalem sliding back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return-* The Hebrew words for "sliding back" and "return" are identical. The image is of a man on a muddy slope; he slides back either into sin, or into the way of the Lord. We must 'slide' one way or the other; every micro decision which makes up the stream of daily life is confirmed by God one way or the other. The refusal to return after taking a wrong turning (:4) is readily imaginable by our generation. If we take a wrong turning, we must come to a point where we humble ourselves and turn back. If we refuse to do this, then we shall be forever lost. We continue going further and further along the wrong path only because we are proud. But they were on a perpetual

sliding back from God's intended path. They "refused to return", because they refused to be ashamed (Jer. 3:3 s.w.); and they "refused" God's word through the prophets because it shamed them (Zech. 7:11). It was pride which was at the core of their refusal, and their perpetual lostness.

*Jeremiah 8:6 I listened and heard, but they didn't speak aright-* The speaker here is God (:5). He was intently listening for the words of repentance He so wished to hear. We see here His eagerness for human repentance. As we go forth into this world to witness, the word we preach is being watched over by God, with His ear eager to hear any sounds of response. This word for intently listening is that used for God's wish that people would intently listen to His word (Jer. 6:17,19 etc.). If we listen, then God will listen to us. Again we see related our attitude to God's word, and His attitude to our words in prayer. Bible reading and response thereto is part and parcel of God's response to our words in prayer.

*No man repents him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Each one turns to his course, as a horse that rushes headlong in the battle-* "What have I done?" is the question God asked Adam and Cain (s.w. Gen. 3:13; 4:10). Adam is everyman, and he specifically represents Israel in their sin. But they refused to listen, and were like a horse set on a course, blinkered to anything apart from rushing headlong forwards along a chosen course. Their question was "Why has Yahweh done this to us?" (Jer. 5:19); when the question should have been rather elicited as to "What have I done?".

*Jeremiah 8:7 Yes, the stork in the sky knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but My people don't know Yahweh's law-* The parallel is between knowing God's law, and repenting (:6). To know God's word is not therefore an academic issue; engagement with His word as intended will elicit repentance. The birds return from migration naturally, and there is the sense that repentance ought to have been somehow the natural response from Israel. A child will naturally repent of bad behaviour; but Israel didn't do this because they were driven by an underlying narrative, that they were right, God was unjust, and they were too proud to accept they had sinned. This is the awful power of human pride. Israel therefore chose to be oblivious of what they well knew; there was no (awareness of) God's judgment in their way of life (Is. 59:8; Jer. 5:4) and therefore they lacked that innate sense of judgment to come which they ought to have had, as surely as the stork knows the coming time for her migration (Jer. 8:7).

*Jeremiah 8:8 How do you say, We are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has worked falsely-* As explained on :7, engagement with God's law was and is designed to elicit repentance. But it didn't in Israel's case, because their scribes had misrepresented God's law as meaning that their idolatry was in fact legitimate worship of Yahweh. As noted on Jer. 7:8,10 and often, the priests and prophets were teaching the illiterate people what they subconsciously wanted to hear. And so it was not simply that the false prophets misled the ignorant masses; the masses wanted to believe that they had not sinned and were free to worship idols as part of their Yahweh worship. And so all society were judged. Those who said "The law of Yahweh is with us" were the prophets and priests, of whom Jeremiah was one. Here he is therefore deeply condemning his very own people. "False... falsely" is the same word used in 2 Chron. 18:22, where God put a false or lying spirit in the mouth of prophets, to confirm His apostate people in the path they chose. And so at Jeremiah's time, "the prophets prophesy falsely" (Jer. 5:31; 6:13 s.w.), falsely saying that the temple would never fall (Jer. 7:14), twisting Yahweh's words to say that.

*Jeremiah 8:9 The wise men are disappointed, they are dismayed and taken: behold, they have rejected the word of Yahweh; and what kind of wisdom is in them?-* Misrepresenting Yahweh's word (:8) was the same as rejecting it. This needs some meditation. Interpreting God's word can so easily be done with our own unconscious agenda in mind; and this can effectively be a rejecting of His word. "Disappointed [ashamed]... dismayed" is the phrase used of all the other nations overcome by the northern invader (Is. 37:27). As noted often so far in Jeremiah, the deliverance of Jerusalem at the last minute during the Assyrian invasion a few generations previously could have been repeated during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. But it wasn't, because there was not enough repentance. And this is the tragedy of those who twist God's word to what they wish it would say- they end their days in disappointment. Judah were not ashamed [s.w. "disappointed"] at their sins (:12), but they would be ultimately. So the disappointment and dismay spoken of here finally will be true only at judgment day. And then it will be too late to change the outcome.

*Jeremiah 8:10 Therefore will I give their wives to others, and their fields to those who shall possess them-* Land and wife were the supreme possessions of a man, and God would give these to others.

*For each one from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest each one deals falsely-* The leadership reflected what the people wanted, and so all of the society was equally guilty. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God's intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "Kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). Israel were all "saints", and yet saints and priests are paralleled in passages like Ps. 132:16. Israel in the wilderness had clothes which didn't wear out- just as the Priestly clothes didn't, and were handed down from generation to generation (so Ex. 29:29 implies). Israel were to teach every man his neighbour and brother, saying, Know the Lord (Heb. 8:11). God therefore saw all Israel as represented by the priests (Hos. 4:9; Is. 24:2; Jer. 5:31; 8:10).

*Jeremiah 8:11 They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace-* There were false prophets both in Judah as the Babylonians approached, and also amongst those of them already in exile (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ez. 13:16). They were assuring the sinful people that in fact they were at peace with God, and that contrary to the prophetic message of desolation at the hand of the Babylonians, they would instead have "peace". This is described in Jeremiah as "slightly" healing the great wound or illness of Judah. That wound is described ambiguously; it was a wound or breach in themselves caused by God's smiting of them in the earlier Babylonian incursions (Jer. 14:19), but also caused by them to God Almighty. "Lightly" carries with it the idea of not serious, light hearted, superficial, trifling. And we must likewise beware of this kind of religion that is pedalled in the name of Christianity; not facing our personal issues, and using a few Bible words from here and there to superficially cover over the most fundamental issues of our eternal destiny. And this was and is so attractive. But sin and its consequences are far deeper than any superficial, light hearted covering. It requires nothing less than the blood and word of the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 8:12 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush-* "Ashamed" is s.w. "disappointed" in :9. They refused to be ashamed, yet they will be ashamed ultimately- in the shame of the rejected in the last day. We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20). Our shame should be before God for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God. Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

*Therefore shall they fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, says Yahweh-* The allusion is to falling down before idols. By doing so they were living out how they were to fall before the nations of those idols. They would be cast down by God, but they had cast themselves down. Sin is its own condemnation.

*Jeremiah 8:13 I will utterly consume them, says Yahweh: no grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf shall fade-* By grace, the people were not utterly consumed. They produced enough fruit even after the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem to bring produce to the temple site as an offering (Jer. 41:5). Jer. 2:21 had stated that Judah brought forth bad grapes; but here, the Hebrew suggests there were no grapes brought forth. So bringing forth an appearance of spiritual fruit is going to be revealed as having no fruit.

*And the things that I have given them shall pass away from them-* The idea is "And I will give them to those who shall pass over them". This is the language of invading armies (Is. 8:7; Dan. 11:10,40).

*Jeremiah 8:14 Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be silent there-* This was an act of disobedience. There was to be destruction in the land, but there was potentially safety / salvation in Jerusalem for those who were obedient and repentant (Jer. 4:5-7). This was a test to Judah, because they trusted in their defenced cities (Jer. 5:17). But the prophecy of Jeremiah 4 (and Mic. 5:11) asks them to believe that these cities would fall, and there would be salvation only in Jerusalem. And yet they were disobedient, and did go

into those other defenced cities.

*For Yahweh our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against Yahweh-* The sufferings of Christ on the cross have connections with the punishments for Israel's sins (e.g. being offered gall to drink = Jer. 8:14; Lam. 3:5). Israel were temporarily forsaken by God because of their sins (Is. 49:14; 54:7), and therefore so was Christ. Christ was chastened with the rod of men "and with the stripes of the children of men", i.e. Israel (Is. 53:5; 1 Pet. 2:24; Mic. 5:1), in His death on the cross.

*Jeremiah 8:15 We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay!-* The false prophets predicted "peace", but it didn't come. And now the people blame this dashed expectation on Yahweh. They liked to cling on to their belief that the false prophets were in fact prophesying from Yahweh, and therefore the failed fulfilments of their words were Yahweh's fault. This was just perversity.

"Good" here refers to the promised Kingdom of God. The future Kingdom is called "good things" in Is. 52:7 (quoted in Rom. 10:15) and Jer. 8:15. "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28) doesn't mean that somehow everything will work out OK for us in this life- for so often they don't. We are asked to carry the Lord's cross, to suffer now and be redeemed in glory later at His return, in the "good things" of the Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 8:16 The snorting of his horses is heard from Dan: at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones the whole land trembles; for they have come, and have devoured the land and all that is in it; the city and those who dwell therein-* News of the Babylonian advance came from Dan in the north, which was in the territory of the ten tribes. This continues the theme that Judah were intended to have learnt from what happened to the ten tribes. The past tense is put for the future here, so certain was God's word of fulfilment. The people trembled in fear because of the Babylonian advance, and yet endlessly assured themselves that the predictions of "peace" by the false prophets were true. This is a quite imaginable situation, and is yet another internal coherence to the Biblical record.

*Jeremiah 8:17 For, behold, I will send serpents, adders, among you, which will not be charmed; and they shall bite you, says Yahweh-* "Charmed" is also translated "orator" or "prayer" (Is. 3:3; 26:16). No prayer, using even the most charming words, was now going to be heard; and for this reason Jeremiah had been told not to pray for the people. But he continued to do so, knowing that God is always open to dialogue. See on Jer. 7:16. There may be an intentional allusion to the serpents in the wilderness (s.w. Num. 21:6,8) whose deadly bite could only be healed by looking in desperate repentance at the brazen serpent, which represented their lifted up future Messiah. For in all these words of judgment there are allusions which suggest the possibility of forgiveness and restoration even at the last moment.

*Jeremiah 8:18 Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! My heart is faint within me-* What begins as Jeremiah's cry from the heart merges into God's- for it is Yahweh who becomes the speaker in :19. Jeremiah's conflicted emotions can be read as his having a too positive view of Israel, and his book of lamentations could therefore be read as a statement of protest at God's judgments. But it could also be that Jeremiah was so in tune with God's thinking that these struggles at the amount of suffering brought upon Judah were also God's. The struggles within Jeremiah would therefore reflect God's changes of mind and feeling about judging His people were endlessly "kindled together", just as they were reflected in Hosea's oscillations of feeling concerning Gomer; see on Hos. 11:8. Jeremiah's heart was "faint within me" both before (Jer. 8:18) and after (Lam. 1:22), the destruction of Jerusalem. He was so sure that the prophetic word that he even felt as if it had come true before it did. It was the heart of Judah which was faint (Is. 1:5), and Jeremiah identified totally with their feelings in sorrow with them.

*Jeremiah 8:19 Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people from a land that is very far off: Isn't Yahweh in Zion? Isn't her King in her? Why have they provoked Me to anger with their engraved images, and with foreign vanities?-* Both God and Jeremiah foresee here the captivity in the "land that is very far off". Or we can read with AV "Because of them that dwell in a far country". Until the cherubim of glory departed from Zion, God's *shekinah* glory was still there. Despite that very clear statement of His presence in Zion, they still worshipped the vain idols of their enemies. It all seemed so incomprehensible even to God. This impression that God found it incomprehensible reflects the degree to which He limits His omniscience in order to enter into legitimate

relationship with His people in real time. Israel after all was the only nation to have the visible symbols of their God's living presence amongst them, as seen in the shekinah glory between the cherubim. And still they preferred the vanities of foreign idols. The same apparently incomprehensible rejection of an evidently living God and Lord goes on today. See on :22.

*Jeremiah 8:20 The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved-* Jeremiah seems to now be thinking ahead, to after the destruction of Jerusalem. That harvest of judgment (Jer. 51:33; Rev. 14:15) would end, and so would the 'Summer harvest', the harvest of tree fruits which followed the main harvest season, which was from April to June- and yet still he foresaw that Judah would not be saved. He speaks in the present tense of that which was yet future. "Saved" is the word which in Greek would form part of the word 'Jesus', Yah saves. And this has been the abiding tragedy of Israelite history; that all the harvests of judgment did not bring them to accept Yah's salvation, which is now in the person of His Son Jesus. Not being saved is paralleled effectively with there being no fruit harvest. Spiritual fruit was required for the intended salvation to come, and that meant repentance. Perhaps in a literal sense, the people looked for salvation from the Babylonian siege in the summer, but it didn't come. Jerusalem fell in August 587 BC (2 Chron. 36:18,19), which would have been at the end of the 'summer [harvest]'.

*Jeremiah 8:21 For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold on me-* We noted on :18 how as the heart of Judah which was faint (Is. 1:5), so was Jeremiah's. He identified totally with their feelings in sorrow with them. And yet "My people" surely speaks of Yahweh Himself as well. God likens Himself to a young man hopelessly in love with a woman (Israel) who was really no good, a man who took the blame when it was undoubtedly her fault (Is. 54:6,7), grieving that she wouldn't return to Him (Am. 4:8 etc.). "I am broken with their whorish heart... I am crushed" (Ez. 6:9; Jer. 8:21 NIV). God likens Himself to a broken man because of Israel's fickleness. He went through the pain of the man who knows He has been forgotten by the woman he still desperately remembers (Hos. 2:13). "Hurt" in Hebrew carries the idea of a breach, and we recall the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 39:2; 52:7); indeed the word seems to have the sense of the rape of a virgin when we read that the virgin daughter of Zion had been breached (Jer. 14:17). And both Jeremiah and even God, according to Jer. 8:21, felt themselves breached in this breach of God's people and city. This was how closely identified God was with His wicked people; and how much more does He feel with us in Christ, we who at least seek not to live as Judah did at that time...

*Jeremiah 8:22 Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then isn't the health of the daughter of my people recovered?-* Gilead's balm was well known (Gen. 37:25; Ez. 27:17). There was balm and a physician in Gilead which could heal the sick person- but they wouldn't go to it. This continues the sense of incomprehension we explained on :19. The cure was readily available- but Judah refused to make use of it.

## Jeremiah Chapter 9

*Jeremiah 9:1 Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a spring of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*- Jeremiah wishes he had more emotional capacity than he has as a person. His desire to weep may mean that he wept before God, and therefore thought he could change God's mind about Judah's judgment.

But like us, Jeremiah didn't always have such a heart of compassion. Initially he didn't even want to preach to his people. And he even prayed that he would so grieve for them in regard to the message he gave them, that he would cry for them day and night. And this prayer was heard. For by Lamentations, this is just what he was doing. And if what we read of Jeremiah troubles us, we too can pray for a heart that bleeds, and through the experience of life which the Lord allows us, He will develop such a heart in those who want it. You may be so caught up in your business, your family, your ecclesia even, your web of social contact... that in honest moments, you know that your heart doesn't bleed as it should. You see the needs and pain and struggle of men and women, but it doesn't touch your heart very deeply. Jeremiah may well have been like this; but he prayed for a new heart, and so can you. Jeremiah had actually been commanded by God to have such a level of grief for His people: "Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken" (Jer. 14:17). Jeremiah's grief was God's word of care and concern to the people; and so it can be with us. Jeremiah was to be like this, to reflect God's passion for His people; so he prayed that he would have such a heart of true compassion [note that the chapters in Jeremiah are totally out of sequence chronologically]; and in the end, he found it.

The Biblical record contains a large number of references to the frequent tears of God's people, both in bleeding hearts for other people, and in recognition of their own sin. And as we have seen, these things are related. Consider:

- "My eye pours out tears to God" [i.e. in repentance?] (Job 16:20)
- Isaiah drenches Moab with tears (Is. 16:9)
- Jeremiah is a fountain of tears for his people (Jer. 9:1; Lam. 2:8)
- David's eyes shed streams of tears for his sins (Ps. 119:136; 6:6; 42:3)
- Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Mt. 23:37)
- Blessed are those who weep (Lk. 6:21)
- Mary washed the Lord's feet with her tears (Lk. 7:36-50)
- Paul wept for the Ephesians daily (Acts 20:19,31).

We have to ask whether there are any tears, indeed any true emotion, in our walk with our Lord. Those who go through life with dry eyes are surely to be pitied. Surely, in the light of the above testimony, we are merely hiding behind a smokescreen if we excuse ourselves by thinking that we're not the emotional type. Nobody can truly go through life humming to themselves "I am a rock, I am an island... and an island never cries". The very emotional centre of our lives must be touched. The tragedy of our sin, the urgency of the world's salvation, the amazing potential provided and secured in the cross of Christ...surely we cannot be passive to these things. We live in a world where emotion and passion are decreasing. Being politically correct, looking right to others... these things are becoming of paramount importance in all levels of society. The passionless, postmodernist life can't be for us, who have been moved and touched at our very core by the work and call and love of Christ to us. For us there must still be what Walter Brueggemann called "the gift of amazement", that ability to feel and say "Wow!" to God's grace and plan of salvation for us.

Jeremiah wished he had more moisture in his body, so that he could weep both day and night for Judah- and yet he goes on to describe them as proceeding from evil to evil in an ever downward spiral, shooting lies everywhere... Everyone is special, nobody is like anyone else. This is how God sees His children, and we should reflect this perspective. It is this which will make us arrestingly different from the people with whom we daily walk. We will cry out with Jeremiah: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?", unmoved and lost as they are in their own petty issues (Lam. 1:12).

*Jeremiah 9:2 Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men-* "Lodging place" is the same word translated "lodge" in Jer. 14:8. There, Jeremiah seems to see it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men. "Treacherous" is used about Judah's marital infidelity in Jer. 3:8,20; Hos. 5:7. And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. He elsewhere speaks as if the emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him (Jer. 15:6). This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

We can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. But the references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in Jer. 9:3 we have the speaker defined: "... and they know not me, said the Lord". These were *God's* thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them. There is a mutuality between God and His people. Several passages in Jeremiah shows how the prophet feels or says something, and Yahweh responds to it (e.g. Jer. 9:1,2 = Jeremiah; v.3 = God; v. 10 = Jeremiah; v. 11 = God's response).

*Jeremiah 9:3 They bend their tongue, as their bow, for falsehood; and they are grown strong in the land, but not for truth: for they proceed from evil to evil, and they don't know Me, says Yahweh-* Jeremiah's mourning turns into that of God Himself. The process of inspiration meant that Jeremiah felt as God did. The proceeding from evil to evil refers to how God was confirming them in the downward path they had chosen; see on Jer. 7:21,24. Specifically, their gossiping was associated with 'proceeding from evil to evil' (Jer. 9:3); it is part of a downward spiral of spirituality. Once gossip starts a quarrel, it's like water bursting out of a dam; soon the whole land of Israel will be flooded (Prov. 17:14 NIV). Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder in Ez. 22:9. There are passages in Jeremiah which describe slander and gossiping as being the reason why God condemned Judah (Jer. 6:28; 9:3-8). The soap operas of the world are full of this kind of gossip and intrigue; they glorify it. And the more we feed ourselves with these things, the more likely we will be to see gossip as just part of life. And yet let's not mistake the words of the prophets; it is seen as murder, because effectively it puts to death a man's relationship with his fellows. God *hates* the man who sows such discord among brethren through gossip in the church (Prov. 6:19). "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22). That casual remark, that passing on of information under the guise of 'concern'- it was a body blow to the one you gossiped about, a blow so hard that it caused deep internal damage.

*Jeremiah 9:4 Beware everyone of his neighbour, and don't trust in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will go about with slanders-* This speaks to Israel as if they were all *Esau*, being warned about the cunning of his brother Jacob: "Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant". Again, in a clever way, both Jacob and Esau are shown to be in the wrong, and Jacob is therefore treated as Esau. See on :26. Perhaps Jeremiah's over positive view of his own people and the priesthood, which would've included his own family and brothers, needed some correction; he is warned here that they will seek to slander and destroy him, which in fact they later did.

*Jeremiah 9:5 They will deceive each one his neighbour and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquity-* Jerusalem 'wearied herself' with lies in that the "lies" were her dishonest covenants with the various surrounding nations, as well as with Yahweh (s.w. Ez. 24:12). She even became 'weary' of this way of life; but still she would not be purged. The Hebrew word carries the idea of loathing; they in a sense hated their sin (s.w. Jer. 9:12), climaxing in Jerusalem loathing herself and wanting to pluck off her own breasts (Ez. 23:34). The world is full of people weary with sin, who loathe their own addictions and sin, yet they will not surrender themselves to God's demands and be purged. We note that as Judah were wearied in their life of sin, so God was wearied [s.w.] in His endless relenting regarding punishing them, and weary of the pain of being deceived and rejected by them (Jer. 15:6). The picture is being built up of a relationship coming to an end, with both sides eliciting the same negative emotions in the other. The God of Israel is not far off and stone faced; He is passionately in relationship with His people, with all the feelings that go with being in relationship.

*Jeremiah 9:6 Your habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me, says Yahweh-* The ESV is correct: "Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the

LORD". The sense is of a downward spiral of spiritual declension. They were so obsessed with immediate wealth that they deceived and oppressed their brethren to get it. This is true of some Pentecostal pastors today just as much as it was of Israel in those days. And indeed, materialism is an addiction, and it leads to an ever increasing spiral of deceit and oppression, however indirect or operated through third parties, in order to attain it.

*Jeremiah 9:7 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how should I deal with the daughter of My people?*- This rhetorical question reflects the 'humanity of God'. He really was as it were in despair at what to do in order to keep them as His people. There was so much dross that He could only melt them in the fire of the Babylonian invasion in order to remove that dross. But it happened that they were resistant even to that; Ezekiel uses the same figure about the same people at this time, and he says that the cauldron holding the metal was destroyed by the heat, and no dross was removed.

Not only in our own self-examination should there be unity between our judgment and that of the Father; elsewhere it is Jeremiah who was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them. And further; if we know the judgments of God, then we will be more strongly motivated in our preaching and pastoral work, to pull men out of the fire of condemnation (Jude 23).

*Jeremiah 9:8 Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit: one speaks peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in his heart he lays wait for him*- The idea in Jer. 5:16 was that every arrow in the quiver of the invaders would bring death; but this was because the tongue of the Jews had been as deadly arrows. This reflects the huge importance God places upon honest words and not being hurtful with our tongues.

Our world's devaluing and misunderstanding of sin has likely affected all of us. We see the rich abusing the poor, manipulation of all sorts going on, petty injustices, hypocrisy in the ecclesia, falsehood, cheating in business, white lies, unkindness to ones' brethren... and we shrug and think that it's just normal, part of life as it is. And yet for the prophets, these things were a catastrophe. Saying one thing to someone whilst feeling differently about them in the heart was the reason for God passionately wishing to take vengeance "on a nation such as this" (Jer. 9:8,9)- note that the whole nation are counted as guilty, in that society just shrugged at hypocritical words. What to us are the daily minor sins and injustices of life were to them issues of cosmic proportion.

*Jeremiah 9:9 Shall I not visit them for these things, says Yahweh*- The "things" are those of :8, the apparently relatively minor sins of deceit and dishonest words. We would rather think that the "things" in view would be idolatry. But dishonest words and hypocritical speaking are of such critical importance to God.

*Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*- God had been Israel's wife and was in love with her. His deep desire for avenging was therefore absolutely connected with His great love for her. There had to be response from Him. This rhetorical question, enquiring as to whether Yahweh should take vengeance on Israel, is thrice repeated in Jeremiah (Jer. 5:9,29; 9:9). The answer of course is "Yes, God would be justified in doing so". And that answer was perhaps the repentance which God sought in order to avert the coming of His judgment.

*Jeremiah 9:10 For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none passes through; neither can men hear the voice of the livestock; both the birds of the sky and the animals are fled, they are gone*- Jeremiah so believed the words he was relaying to Israel, that he now interjects with his own grief at what was to happen. Jeremiah speaks of the pain of *his* heart after having spoken of the pain that would reach unto the heart of Judah (Jer. 4:18,19). The pain of their heart became the pain of his heart. And yet Jeremiah had the mind of God in this sense, as David was after God's own heart. This is reflected by the way in which it is very difficult at times in Jeremiah to decide who is speaking- Jeremiah, or God. Jer. 9:1-3,10,11 is a good passage to work through from this perspective, asking 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4).

But the picture presented here is of the complete destruction of all life in the land, through fire. But this didn't happen; soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, the people who remained [who were many] still brought food offerings to the site of the temple (Jer. 41:5). This word will come finally true, for the 'heavens and earth' of Israel are to be destroyed by fire in the last days just as the world of Noah's time was destroyed by water (2 Pet. 3). But in

Jeremiah's time, the full extent of the planned wrath didn't come about. Perhaps there was a modicum of repentance or intercession which stopped it, or perhaps God delayed, reapplied or rescheduled His full intentions because He knew that Judah would not repent as intended.

*Jeremiah 9:11 I will make Jerusalem heaps, a dwelling place of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant-* As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. As noted on :10, we note again the shift of speaker from Jeremiah to God. What began as Jeremiah's interjection of pain in :10 now merges into the actual prophetic thoughts of God. The jackal comes to eat what the lion has left in the carcase; the idea was that after the lions of Babylon had finished with Jerusalem, there would be others who came to totally destroy her. But this didn't historically happen, because it seems God relented from the full execution of His wrath. The language here of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon (Jer. 51:37). What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

*Jeremiah 9:12 Who is the wise man, that may understand this? Who is he to whom the mouth of Yahweh has spoken, that he may declare it?-* Whoever truly understood God's word would declare it. Hearing God's word in faith is associated with declaring it (Jer. 9:12). "Your participation in the [preaching of the] gospel" is paralleled with "your faith" (Phil. 1:5). If we really believe, we will be involved in the preaching of what we believe. The false prophets were the "wise men" of Jer. 8:9. If they were truly wise they would declare the same truths which Jeremiah was stating. It would be true to say that attitudes to evangelism reflect the sincerity of an individual's belief.

*Why is the land perished and burned up like a wilderness, so that none passes through?-* Already God had sent famine, so the land was perished, and for fear of the Babylonian incursions, Palestine was no longer a highway and the Jews were scared to travel. Perhaps "the land" in view is also specifically that of the ten tribe kingdom which had already been destroyed, and which Judah was intended to take warning from.

*Jeremiah 9:13 Yahweh says, Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, neither walked therein-* God's law and His voice are paralleled. The word was to be seen as a living word, God actively in ongoing communication with people; rather than a set of regulations which could be partially obeyed on the level of cultural conformity to the faith of their fathers. And that is a challenge which echoes to God's people of all generations.

*Jeremiah 9:14 But have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them-* The choice was between walking after God's word (:13), or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

*Jeremiah 9:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink-* This judgment was taken by the Lord Jesus on the cross, who was there "the servant of Yahweh", which Israel had been intended to be. Wormwood and gall were what would be the result of false teachers encouraging the people to commit idolatry (Dt. 29:18). So they had fed themselves with these things, and their judgment to drink them was therefore God's confirmation of people in what they themselves had chosen. And that is how all His judgments operate.

*Jeremiah 9:16 I will scatter them also among the nations, whom neither they nor their fathers have known-* Judah

were to be scattered to the Babylonian empire, whom they had not "known"; although they eagerly served their gods, to the point of sacrificing their children to them. But they didn't "know" them in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with them. For Yahweh was and is unique in offering passionate personal relationship. This sets the background for the magnificent statement in :24 that God's true people "know" Him.

*And I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them-* As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. The jackals who were to come after the Babylonian lions to finish off the carcass (see on :11) didn't come.

*Jeremiah 9:17 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Consider, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the skilful women, that they may come-* The wonder of this is to be 'considered'; for as explained on :18, it is quite something for God Almighty to invite mourning over "us", the failed relationship He was in with Israel, with all the tragedy of that statement. The idea of mourning women was that they were intended to provoke mourning in others, and this was God's desire too. Or it could be that in line with the statement in :1, both God and Jeremiah felt unable to lament as much as they wished, they were at full personal capacity, and 'needed' others to mourn in addition.

*Jeremiah 9:18 And let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters-* "The Lord of hosts" even calls the mourning women to come "and raise a lament over us" (Jer. 9:17,18). The "us" is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. The intimacy is such that some versions replace the "us" with "you". But this is an example of translation bias when the translator cannot accept the wonder of God's true revelation.

*Jeremiah 9:19 For a voice of wailing is heard out of Zion, How are we ruined! We are greatly confounded-* We are either ashamed of our sins in repentance; or we will be made ashamed of them in the judgment (Jer. 6:15 RVmg.)- it's shame either way. We either wail for our sins now, or we will wail for them at judgment day (Jer. 9:19,20).

*Because we have forsaken the land, because they have cast down our dwellings-* The idea is "Our dwellings have cast us out". This is picturing the inhabitants of Zion as they realize they are going to be taken into captivity. Hence GNB: "Listen to the sound of crying in Zion: "We are ruined! We are completely disgraced! We must leave our land; our homes have been torn down". The homes that were torn down are those of the wealthy, the historical records emphasize that both the "great houses" and the temple were thrown down. So those "in Zion" who are wailing are the wealthy leadership; for it was they and not the poor of the land who were taken into captivity. The mourning women are called to add their voice to these women who are actually wailing as they face captivity (:18).

*Jeremiah 9:20 Yet hear the word of Yahweh, you women, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth; and teach your daughters wailing, and each one her neighbour lamentation-* To "hear the word of Yahweh" is a call to repentance. Even when facing captivity, these women could still repent. We note in Jeremiah that the women are given more emphasis than in contemporary accounts. Later in Jeremiah we learn that they were absolutely behind the behaviour of their men. If they lamented for the tragedy of what had happened in spiritual terms, and not just for the human tragedy of it all, then they would soon return. We see God's enthusiasm for their repentance, imagining it, wanting to even teach them repentance.

The women were to teach this song of repentance through lamentation to others. Those who heard God's call to repentance are to *naturally* teach repentance to others (Jer. 9:20 cp. 19). If we have really received forgiveness, and have thereby grasped hold of salvation here and now, the wonder of our own experience will inevitably lead us to tell others, as it did David and Peter.

*Jeremiah 9:21 For death has come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces; to cut off the children from outside, and the young men from the streets-* This is part of the dirge of repentance God wanted them to learn (:20). They were to accept that the judgment of death had come upon them like a flood, right up to their windows out of which they were looking. Their great houses, or "palaces", had been entered by death. But they were still alive. It

was like the living lamenting their own death. The idea was that they recognized that the judgment of death was correct and appropriate; and yet by grace they would be saved out of it. It was as if from the windows they were watching the children and youths perishing in the streets- even though they had sacrificed their own firstborns to the idols. This was the picture alluded to in Zech. 8:5, where in the reborn Zion, the youth and children would play happily in the streets when all possibility of such condemnation was taken away.

*Jeremiah 9:22 Speak, Thus says Yahweh-* It is as if the funeral dirge was being taught to them in stanzas.

*The dead bodies of men shall fall as dung on the open field, and as the handful after the harvester; and none shall gather them-* This is a repeat of Jeremiah's prophetic words, but the repentant women are asked to repeat them. By so doing they would demonstrate their acceptance of the justice of the condemnation. The harvester dropped handfuls of grain which the impoverished gleaners like Ruth then picked up; but there would be no gleaners. Repentance involves accepting that God's judgments are right, and placing them in our own mouths in agreement.

*Jeremiah 9:23 Thus says Yahweh, Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, don't let the rich man glory in his riches-* This is still part of the song of mourning and repentance which Yahweh wanted them to sing (see on :20). The false prophets were the "wise men" of Jer. 8:9. And so the repentant dirge was to involve a repudiation of those men in favour of a humble acceptance of God's word and principles (:24). The rich and mighty are identified here with the "wise men". They had become wealthy through religiously and spiritually abusing the people. The wealthy women who were about to go into captivity (for the "poor of the land" didn't go into captivity) were to resign the importance of personal wealth and glory. This too is part of repentance.

*Jeremiah 9:24 But let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me-* The repentance song (:20) was to involve the recognition that the only true understanding is repentant relationship with Yahweh. This must be given full weight today, where "understanding" and "knowledge" have become understood to mean pure academic, theological knowledge. But the true understanding is in repentance and from our knees, arising to relationship with God. The glory in 'knowing' Yahweh is set against the background of :16. Judah were to be scattered to the Babylonian empire, whom they had not "known"; although they eagerly served their gods, to the point of sacrificing their children to them. But they didn't "know" them in the Hebraic sense of having relationship with them. For Yahweh was and is unique in offering passionate personal relationship.

*That I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh-* The women were about to go into captivity and had lost their loved ones. But the repentance song involves accepting that Yahweh is just, and full of grace, kindness and righteousness. His "delight" is in them; He just loves doing them. But Israel had turned away from them. Although God does slay the wicked, He has no "delight" in that (Ez. 18:23,32 s.w.). Repentance involves the faith that God's dominant desire is kindness and salvation, although He does justly judge sin. This would have been a hard funeral dirge to sing, lamenting over the dead bodies of those who had just been slain. Repentance and humility before God involves accepting that He is essentially just as well as gracious. And so many find this song hard to sing. It is the spirit of Hab. 3:17,18, where despite the hard reality of the Babylonian destruction, Habakkuk still rejoices and exalts in the God whose ways he obviously struggled to immediately understand. This is in fact the true understanding and knowledge of God.

*Jeremiah 9:25 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will punish all those who are circumcised along with the uncircumcised-* Jer. 9:25 RV speaks of punishing "them which are circumcised in their uncircumcision". As Paul makes clear, one can be circumcised physically but not spiritually. A person can be circumcised yet effectively uncircumcised at one and the same time. This is the nature of the spiritual schizophrenia which so afflicts us. This verse ends the funeral dirge of repentance which God had wished the women to sing in :20-24; now He points out that physical circumcision is not going to make any difference. Perhaps the false prophets had taught that circumcision meant that the covenant was with Judah and they could not therefore be destroyed. The fact the ten tribes were destroyed, although circumcised, was wilfully overlooked. As circumcision was seen as something which was the duty of the women to perform, this point is perhaps made at this point because the women have just been specifically addressed. Covenant relationship involved understanding and knowing God in repentance (see on :24)- not in physical circumcision.

*Jeremiah 9:26 Egypt, Judah, Edom and the children of Ammon, Moab and all that have the corners of their hair cut off, who dwell in the wilderness; for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart-* This makes it clear right back then that circumcision was a matter of the heart more than the flesh; and that therefore there was no essential difference between a spiritually uncircumcised Israel and their apostate cousins. See on :4. The surrounding nations had their various signs of identification, often connected with how their hair or beards were cut. The sign of identity God had chosen was not visible; it was upon the most concealed part of the male body. And this spoke of how the real sign of identity as God's people was in fact nothing external, but in the state of heart, a way of thinking with the flesh cut off from it. This is why we may look the same as others in this world, on some counts. But the difference is in our hearts.

## Jeremiah Chapter 10

*Jeremiah 10:1 Hear the word which Yahweh speaks to you, house of Israel!-* This is no mere formal introduction, a standard rubric. It is a desperate appeal for repentance.

*Jeremiah 10:2 Thus says Yahweh, Don't learn the way of the nations, and don't be dismayed at the signs of the sky; for the nations are dismayed at them-* There was still hope that there could be a miraculous last minute deliverance of Jerusalem, as had happened in the time of Hezekiah. The surrounding nations had all been "dismayed" and destroyed (2 Kings 19:26). Judah were not to be like them; but they were following their astrology, and the results of that "dismayed" them. They were desperately 'learning' the religion of those who were about to destroy them, rather than learning God's way through repentance (Jer. 9:23,24). They should instead have been dismayed at Jeremiah's prophetic words; and to have seen the connection with the frequent exhortations *not* to be dismayed but to possess the Kingdom (Dt. 1:21; Josh. 1:9 etc.). Jeremiah had been commanded not to be dismayed (Jer. 1:9 s.w.); he was to be their example, as is every preacher to be the word made flesh. "Dismay" was a punishment from God upon them (Jer. 17:18) but as with all Divine judgments, this was just an extension of what the people had done to themselves. For they had dismayed themselves.

Many Babylonian cuneiform tablets are in the British Museum in London. They claim that "the appearance of comets, eclipses of the sun and moon, earthquakes, and in fact every kind of change occasioned by the atmosphere, whether good or bad, both to nations and to kings and private individuals [were omens of future events]". The British Museum collection of inscriptions lists "A collection of twenty-five tablets of the signs of heaven and earth, according to their good presage and their bad... Tablets [regarding] the signs of the heaven, along with the star (comet) which has a corona in front and a tail behind; the appearance of the sky". Judah were desperately trying to learn the astrology of the Babylonians as the Babylonian army approached. But they are being told this was all nonsense.

*Jeremiah 10:3 For the customs of the peoples are vanity; for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman with the axe-* Judah were bidden look at things from a bird's eye view, and to perceive how bizarre is idolatry. All idolatry is vanity because it is the work of human hands. The way of spirituality is to accept God's work rather than the work of our own hands. They were 'learning' the astrology of the Babylonians who were about to destroy them (:2); and now they were accepting the "statutes" or "customs" of those people, taking on the yoke of a new law and religious system in the name of Yahweh worship. And thereby ignoring His law.

*Jeremiah 10:4 They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it not move-* This alludes to very similar language in Is. 40:20; 41:7. See on :5. "Deck" is the word used of how the Jews tried to make themselves attractive to the other nations by as it were 'dressing themselves up' (Jer. 4:30). They did this through worshipping their idols. This confirms the impression that on the eve of destruction, they were turning to the idols of their attackers rather than to Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 10:5 They are like a palm tree, of turned work, and don't speak-* "Turned work" is a word only used about the beaten work of the tabernacle (Ex. 25:18,31,36 etc.). We will suggest on :9 that they were building a new kind of tabernacle for their idols.

*They must be carried, because they can't walk. Don't be afraid of them; for they can't do evil, neither is it in them to do good-* This is quoting from Is. 46:7. There are many points of similarity between Jeremiah and Isaiah, because the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian siege in Isaiah's time could still be replicated at Jeremiah's time. But afterwards, Hezekiah dropped the baton, and so later Isaiah goes on to lament how the Babylonians would come and destroy Judah, and how the people would turn to idolatry and persecute the true prophets. This was now coming true in Jeremiah's time. Is. 45:5-7 in the same context puts all this another way in saying that Yahweh is the source of good and evil [in the sense of disaster], light and darkness- rather than the Babylonians gods of good and evil.

*Jeremiah 10:6 There is none like You, Yahweh; You are great, and Your name is great in might-* The supreme, ultimate greatness of Yahweh meant that all claims of other gods were worth nothing. This continues the allusions to

later Isaiah, this time to Is. 46:9. See on :5.

*Jeremiah 10:7 Who should not fear You, King of the nations? For it is appropriate for You; because among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royal estate, there is none like You-* It was the prophetic potential that Israel and Judah would repent together, return from captivity, and re-establish the Kingdom of God in Israel under a Messianic ruler, with the surrounding nations also repentant and acceptant of Israel's God. "Who should not..." accept Yahweh out of the nations? We marvel how with Israel so deeply resistant to God's purpose at this point, still the prophets allude to this massive potential. See on :11. This was not fulfilled at the time, but this passage is quoted in Rev. 15:4 as having ultimate fulfilment in the last days.

*Jeremiah 10:8 But they are together primitive and foolish: the instruction of idols! It is but a stock-* The idea that a piece of wood could teach God's people is mocked; but this is in the context of how :1,2 have condemned Judah for earnestly seeking to "learn" the religious ways of Babylon. They stood in front of a piece of wood in order to be taught by it. "Primitive" translates a word which effectively means 'kindling wood' (s.w. Ex. 35:3). They were wooden, and would be the kindling which brought about the final burning of Jerusalem. See on Jer. 11:16.

*Jeremiah 10:9 There is silver beaten into plates which is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the artificer and of the hands of the goldsmith; blue and purple for their clothing; they are all the work of skilful men-* Silver, plates, gold, blue, purple and the work of skilled craftsmen is all language reminiscent of the construction of the tabernacle and high priestly robes. The new religious system and laws which they were desperately learning (see on :1,2) was a quasi law of Moses. And yet it was done in the name of Yahweh worship; this explains the similarities, and also how the people also called to Yahweh at this time. See on :5,12,20.

*Jeremiah 10:10 But Yahweh is the true God; He is the living God and an everlasting King-* A bald statement, urging the Jews on the eve of destruction to quit their idolatry and return wholeheartedly to Yahweh. He was alive, whereas the idols were just dead wood (:8). He would last for ever, whereas the idols of that age, as of every age, stand only for a short time.

*At His wrath the earth trembles, and the nations are not able to withstand His indignation-* The earth / land of Israel along with the nations was to be judged. Perhaps a literal earthquake was in view, as mentioned in many of the prophets. It was the prophetic intention that the judgment of Babylon and her coalition would follow soon after their judgment of Israel. This didn't happen as intended, because the lack of repentance precluded the scenario happening then. But as the book of Revelation makes clear, this will all come true in the last days.

*Jeremiah 10:11 You shall say this to them: The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens-* This verse stands out from those around it in that it is written in Chaldee. Perhaps this was intended to be sent and spoken to the Babylonians. To curse a nation's gods was the ultimate insult. And this is what Jeremiah was doing. And he says this when Judah were desperately learning the religion of the Babylonians (:1,2) in the hope that it would save them from Babylon. But the hope also was that Babylon and the surrounding nations would repent and come to Yahweh; see on :7. The Babylonians worshipped the heavenly bodies; but they were worshipping the created rather than the creator.

*Jeremiah 10:12 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens-* This contrast between the idols and Yahweh as the creator of all things is typical of the later part of Isaiah; see on :5. The language of setting up ("established", literally 'to make stand erect') and stretching out suggests that the heavens and earth are a tent or tabernacle. This alludes to how the Jews were desperately constructing a tabernacle to idols; see on :9,20.

*Jeremiah 10:13 When He utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures-* This could refer to a literal thunderstorm that burst over Jerusalem as Jeremiah was speaking. The waters which arose from the ends of the land represented the nations arising from the boundaries of *eretz* Israel, who were to come in judgment upon Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 10:14 Every man has become primitive and without knowledge; every goldsmith is disappointed by his engraved image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them-* This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. The same word for "disappointed" is used of what would happen to the idols of Babylon (Jer. 50:2). Just before the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, the Jews within the city were making those very same idols, and would be disappointed in them just as Babylon was to be. It was the idols who were primitive and without knowledge (:8); and those who make and worship idols become like unto them, also "primitive..." (Ps. 115:8). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship. It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

*Jeremiah 10:15 They are vanity, a work of delusion-* It is emphasized in Jer. 10:15, 16 that the God of Jacob is not an idol, nor is He created by an 'errorist'- using the same rare Hebrew word concerning Jacob being a 'deceiver' in Gen. 27:12. Jacob was a 'deceiver', and for much of his life did not accept Yahweh as his God, preferring the idols of the land (Gen. 28:20,21). Yet Jer. 10:15,16 says that idols are made by 'deceivers', and the God Jacob believed in was not an idol like this. God is almost turning everything upside down to frame a weak, faltering Jacob as the very opposite. And He will do likewise with every one of the true Israel.

*In the time of their visitation they shall perish-* The same words are used of how ultimately Babylon itself would realize this about its own idols (Jer. 51:18). All idols fail at their point of critical testing; the Babylonians should have learnt from the way their idols never saved Jerusalem from destruction. Here we see God's wonderful hope, that even Babylon would repent. We give up on people far too easily compared to Him. The common prophetic idea of "the day / time of visitation" is applied by Peter to the day of the Lord's return and the final judgment (1 Pet. 2:12). All these prophetic possibilities never quite came about in their day; but they will do, in the last day.

*Jeremiah 10:16 The portion of Jacob is not like these-* See on :15. Jacob inherits God, having Him as his portion; and God inherits Israel / Jacob. We see here the mutuality intended between God and Israel. This is yet another reflection of God's recognition that finally, Jacob fulfilled his promise to make Yahweh his God (Gen. 28:20). The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt.

*For He is the former of all things; and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name-* It was the prophetic hope that Judah and the ten tribe kingdom would unite as one in the restored kingdom of God in Israel. "Israel" is therefore described here as a singular tribe.

*Jeremiah 10:17 Gather up your wares out of the land, you who live under siege-* "Wares" is literally "bundle"; the idea is that the siege would end with the people going into captivity with just a bundle of belongings. This prophecy was given in the very last moments of opportunity, whilst the people were besieged.

*Jeremiah 10:18 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the land at this time, and will distress them, that they may feel it-* But in wrath, God remembered mercy. For not all the inhabitants of the land were taken into captivity. Only the ruling classes were. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed,

hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

*Jeremiah 10:19 Woe is me because of my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it-* This was Jeremiah's pained interjection, but as often, we find his feelings are those of God. And so here in a context where the first person pronouns clearly refer to God and not Jeremiah, we read: "Woe is me for my hurt! My wound is grievous... truly this is a grief, and I must bear it. My tabernacle is spoiled... my children are gone forth... there is none to stretch forth my tent" (Jer. 10:18-20). This is the almost unbelievable extent of God's pain and hurt for His people. Truly did it hurt God more than His children knew to punish them. "Hurt" is literally 'breaking'. God was broken by His people's behaviour. It is the word often used of the breaking up of Jerusalem and Judah (Jer. 4:6,20 etc.); but this as it were broke the heart of God (see on Jer. 8:21). The deadly, "grievous" wound suffered by Judah was felt by God as His "grief" (Jer. 6:7). We have a window here onto how the Father felt the sufferings of His Son, when "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself". To explain that as simply meaning "Jesus = God" is to miss so much that it is a tragic misinterpretation. The judgment sufferings for sin were thereby felt by the God who brought them. The very words for 'bearing grief' are used in Is. 53:4 of how the Lord Jesus bore the griefs of condemned Israel, and indeed all the people of God. For all have sinned and merit condemnation. Jeremiah at this point knew those essential feelings of the Messianic saviour figure, which were also the feelings of God. "I must bear it" would then be Jeremiah's desire to try to bear their condemnation, as ultimately only the Lord Jesus could do for Israel. He sees himself as the lamb led to slaughter in Jer. 11:19.

*Jeremiah 10:20 My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth from me, and they are no more: there is none to spread my tent any more, and to set up my curtains-* God speaks of the tabernacle rather than the temple because it seems from :9 that they were constructing another tabernacle, but to the gods of Babylon. We noted on :9,12 that God had set up His tabernacle / tent just as He had stretched out the skies at creation. But the Jews were building another tabernacle to other gods. They had taken down Yahweh's tent thereby, and so God was as it were left homeless, able to identify with those left homeless. We deduce from the argument here how Almighty God is in a sense "in need of man", as Avraham Heschel put it. He had nobody to spread out His tent- He, the God who spread out the skies of the cosmos by His great power.

*Jeremiah 10:21 For the shepherds are become primitive, and have not inquired of Yahweh: therefore they have not prospered, and all their flocks are scattered-* Those who ought to have set up the tabernacle in :20 were the priests and Levites, and they had turned away from Yahweh. This was especially hard for Jeremiah to utter, seeing he was from a priestly family. The shepherds, the priests, became "primitive", the same word used of the idols themselves in :8,14. They became like that which they worshipped (Ps. 115:8). Any shepherd / teacher should themselves be ever 'inquiring' of Yahweh. But they instead were learning all they could about idol worship (:1,2). They did not 'prosper', Heb. 'understand'; and so new pastors were needed, who would teach understanding (Jer. 3:15 s.w.).

*Jeremiah 10:22 The voice of proclamation, behold, it comes, and a great commotion out of the north country-* The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels in Ezekiel is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

*To make the cities of Judah a desolation, a dwelling place of jackals-* As explained on Jer. 9:10, this didn't completely happen to the extent here prophetically envisaged. The jackal comes to eat what the lion has left in the carcase; the idea was that after the lions of Babylon had finished with Jerusalem, there would be others who came to totally destroy her. But this didn't historically happen, because it seems God relented from the full execution of His wrath. The language here of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon (Jer. 51:37). What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation,

where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

*Jeremiah 10:23 Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man who walks to direct his steps-* The passage from :23-25 could be a prayer of Jeremiah, who recognizes his own sinfulness on a personal level. In this case we see how he prayed despite being asked by God not to pray (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:7). But it could also be the wish or even fantasy of God for the repentance of the people; these are the words He imagines an individual repentant Israelite saying. The idea is perhaps that man cannot direct his path whilst he is walking; he must firstly direct his steps, and then walk accordingly. The way of Adam (Heb.) would allude to how Adam could not direct his own way back to the tree of life; the Angel cherubim would keep that way and direct man upon it (Gen. 3:24). Jeremiah sees the exile of Judah to the east as the driving out of Adam eastward from Eden, the same *eretz* Israel. And he knew now that it would not be of man, of Israel as it was not of Adam, to get back; it required the Angel cherubim to bring them back. And that was just the message of Ezekiel at this same time and context. It is Yahweh alone who can direct the steps of man (same words in Prov. 16:9).

*Jeremiah 10:24 Yahweh, correct me, but in measure: not in Your anger, lest you bring me to nothing-* If this is a personal prayer of Jeremiah on behalf of the people, then perhaps God did hear; because He did indeed correct them "in measure" (s.w. Jer. 30:11 "I will correct you in measure, and not leave you altogether unpunished"), but the full extent of His prophesied anger [such as the destruction of all animal and human life in the land by fire] was not carried out. Judah were not literally 'brought to nothing'. This was in response to Jeremiah's prayer here- to correct / punish [s.w.] Judah, but not bring them to nothing. The same phrase "bring to nothing" is found in Jer. 30:19, where God promises that He will not bring Judah to nothing. This was in direct response to Jeremiah's prayer here. Jeremiah here is praying as representative of all Israel, just as he personally says "Amen" to the offer of the new covenant in Jer. 11:5.

*Jeremiah 10:25 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that don't know You, and on the families that don't call on Your name: for they have devoured Jacob, yes, they have devoured him and consumed him, and have laid waste his habitation-* This could mean that although those nations were used by God to execute judgment, they were willing and eager to abuse Israel, and so were to be punished. Or perhaps they went beyond their commission, and it was for this that they were punished (Is. 10:6,7; 47:6; Zech. 1:15). Yet we could read Jeremiah here as out of step with God's hope that even Babylon would repent; and failing to realize the extent to which Judah deserved their punishments.

## Jeremiah Chapter 11

*Jeremiah 11:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* Jeremiah is not a chronological book. This could refer to the time when the book of the covenant was discovered by Josiah; or it could be a reminder at a later point that the people ought to have been obedient to that covenant which had been discovered and proclaimed.

*Jeremiah 11:2 Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem-* See on :1. The allusion is indeed to the book of the covenant discovered by Josiah. But we should also consider that according to Jer. 31, Ez. 20 etc., God offered a new covenant to the people at this time, seeing they had broken the old covenant in the form of the Mosaic law.

*Jeremiah 11:3 And say to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Cursed is the man who doesn't hear the words of this covenant-* The allusion is to how the old covenant was pronounced, and this same curse was made binding. Like us, Israel were reminded that His covenant with His people was not a mere historical incident. His word is living, and the covenant applied to them just as much as it did to those who first heard it; with the attendant blessings and cursings. We can likewise reflect how the promises to Abraham are similarly personally relevant to us, being the basis of the new covenant.

*Jeremiah 11:4 Which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace saying, Obey My voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so you shall be My people, and I will be your God-* They had been saved from the furnace of Egypt, but they were now within the furnace of Jerusalem (Ez. 22:18,20). Just as they had been saved from the Egyptian furnace, so now they also could be from that of Divine judgment. But the deliverance was to be conditional upon obedience. The commandments to be obeyed were not mere tests of obedience or loyalty; "so you shall be My people" means that they were designed in order to facilitate in practice the relationship between God and His people. The deliverance from the furnace of Egypt was in order that they become God's people (Dt. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51). But if they didn't want to become God's people, then deliverance would be pointless. The furnace was to be a refining process (Is. 48:10), but if they didn't want this, then they would be destroyed in that furnace.

*Jeremiah 11:5 That I may establish the oath which I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day-* We need to remember in our preaching that success is potentially possible; God is working through us to give those we intersect with the chance of a real salvation. Their rejection shouldn't be so discouraging the more we perceive that we on God's side in all this, He is working through us to try to appeal to them. And appreciating this will give a far greater intensity and urgency of appeal to our preaching. In Jer. 11:4,5 God speaks of how obedience is required in order for Him to fulfil the promises to us which He so wishes to fulfil: "Be my people... and this will allow me to carry out the oath that I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as I have in fact done" ["as at this day"]. We see here how God allows Himself to be limited by us- we can 'allow Him' to carry out His purposes, or not. And yet in this example we see His grace, in the words "As I have in fact done". For Israel weren't obedient to the covenant- and yet He still gave them the promised land. His grace shines through, breaking even His own conditions.

*Then answered I and said, Amen, Yahweh-* This is reminiscent of Israel saying "Amen" to the covenant. Jeremiah acts on their behalf, just as his prayer at the end of Jer. 10 is in the first person, but is representative of all Israel.

*Jeremiah 11:6 Yahweh said to me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem saying, Hear the words of this covenant, and do them-* In Jer. 5:1, Jeremiah was asked to run to and fro in those streets, representing God in search of man. The medium of God's searching for man is the word of offer of covenant relationship with Him. Obedience to this commandment would have taken Jeremiah some time. "The cities of Judah" had not yet fallen to the Babylonians, so this prophecy must be relatively early in his ministry. Hearing and doing is the classic language of obedience to the covenant (e.g. Dt. 4:1). James alludes to it in saying that those under the new covenant likewise are to both hear and do. We note that Jeremiah doesn't repeat the covenant here; perhaps because he is referring to the book of the covenant found by Josiah (:1,2).

*Jeremiah 11:7 For I earnestly protested to your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, rising early and protesting saying, Obey My voice-* Again we have the sense of God's living word, speaking to every generation. What He said to their fathers was spoken to every subsequent generation "even to this day". This is the art of faithful Bible reading- perceiving God's historical voice as coming to us personally. "Protested" is the same word translated "testify" in the records of the giving of the covenant; and that testifying was "by heaven and earth" (Dt. 30:19), whom Israel were now worshipping as Babylon worshipped them, rather than seeing in them evidence of Yahweh's creation.

*Jeremiah 11:8 Yet they didn't obey, nor turn their ear, but walked each one in the stubbornness of their evil heart-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they didn't do them-* Again we see God's grace. Because not all the curses for covenant breaking were brought upon Israel. In wrath He remembered mercy, even when they were impenitent.

*Jeremiah 11:9 Yahweh said to me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem-* The conspiracy against Jeremiah by his own local people and family (:19) was itself a reflection of how these men had as it were made a conspiracy against God. As Jeremiah's positive view of his own people seems to have prevented him from perceiving it, so God reveals Himself as shocked that as it were 'in secret', His people had conspired against Him. We see here the unity between God and His servant. The idea of a conspiracy suggests a wilful, conscious decision to rebel against God. It is the consciousness of their disobedience which is so stunning. They were led into this by their false prophets telling them that they could serve Yahweh in ways which were disobedient to His covenant. Hence the contemporary Ez. 22:25 says that the "conspiracy" (s.w.) was amongst the false prophets.

*Jeremiah 11:10 They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear My words; and they are gone after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers-* Judah were continually being reminded by Jeremiah that they were not better than the ten tribe kingdom of Israel, and would meet a similar destruction and exile as they had. The breaking of covenant was a conscious act, indicated by it being a "conspiracy" (:9). If they had "turned back" to God, then the exiles would have been "turned back" to Zion. But instead they had "turned back" to the sins of their fathers. This point is significant in that Ez. 18 reflects how they considered they were being unfairly punished for the sins of their fathers. But here they are reminded that they were committing the very same sins as their fathers.

*Jeremiah 11:11 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on them, which they shall not be able to escape; and they shall cry to Me, but I will not listen to them-* And yet the many prophetic messages at this time showed that they were "able to escape". But they chose not to. We noted on :9 and :5 how Jeremiah personally was representative of Judah. They were told here that prayer was going to be pointless for them; hence Jeremiah personally was commanded not to pray in their name (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:7). This is perhaps the nadir of all existence; for God's people to be unable to pray to Him. This is the picture of condemnation; this will be the reason for gnashing of teeth.

*Jeremiah 11:12 Then shall the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem go and cry to the gods to which they offer incense: but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble-* The time of Jacob's trouble was to come at the Babylonian entry into Jerusalem. In that moment, Jacob should surely have cried to his God; but tragically, they cried to the gods of their invaders. As observed earlier, idols always fail at the point of critical testing; the Babylonians should have learnt from the way their idols never saved Jerusalem from destruction. Here we see God's wonderful hope, that even Babylon would repent. We give up on people far too easily compared to Him. In Jer. 2:27

God had fantasized that His people in the "time of their trouble" (s.w.) would cry *to Him*. But now He as it were faces the reality that they would cry to their idols and not to Him. And yet whilst crying to the idols, they would also cry to Him (:14). We have the picture of them crying out to every god they had ever worshipped, as well as Yahweh. But that is not the singular faith in Him which He can respond to. He is not one of many options and loves of our lives. He is to be the passion of our faithful, loyal hearts.

*Jeremiah 11:13 For according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have you set up altars to the shameful thing, even altars to burn incense to Baal-* Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon (Jer. 11:13)- and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. If we don't come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4). Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9).

*Jeremiah 11:14 Therefore don't pray for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry to Me because of their trouble-* See on :12. For the sake of our prayers, in some cases sins of others can be forgiven when otherwise they wouldn't be. For the sake of our conversion of our erring brethren, they can be saved from eternal death and have their sins covered. The Lord's prayer says as much- we ask God to forgive us *our* sins; not 'me my sins'. Likewise only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them (Jer. 7:16 cp. 11:14). Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his "cry" was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same- Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which otherwise, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. If we have any grain of love in us, we will likewise dedicate ourselves to fervent prayer for our brethren, seeing it does have effect and validity within certain boundaries.

Christ did not pray for the world (Jn. 17:9), which in the context seems to refer to the unrepentant Jewish world (cp. Jer. 11:14; 1 Jn. 5:8) as well as the surrounding (Roman) world.

Ez. 22:30 says that if a person had been found at this time who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" in Ez. 22:30 is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

*Jeremiah 11:15 What has My beloved to do in My house-* Despite casting them out of His house, God still calls them His "beloved". This is really love amazing, and grace without compare.

*Since she has worked lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from you? When you do evil, then you rejoice-* LXX: "Will prayers and holy offerings take away thy wickedness from thee, or shalt thou escape by these things?". GNB: "Do they think they can prevent disaster by making promises and by offering animal sacrifices? Will they then rejoice?". It's clear from :12,14 that they cried out to their idols when in their final desperation, and yet Jer. 2:27 says that at that point they cried to Yahweh as well. Likewise it seems they were madly offering sacrifices to every god they knew, including Yahweh. And that was exactly why God didn't respond to them.

*Jeremiah 11:16 Yahweh called your name, A green olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit-* The Lord's words as He carried the cross "If they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" is packed with allusion to O.T. Scriptures (Ez. 17:24; Jer. 11:16,19; Ps. 1; Jer. 17:5-8). His preceding words to the women were likewise; His quotation from Hos. 10:8 is set in a context so appropriate to the situation He was in. If they did these things to Him, the green and healthy shoot, what would be done to the dry dead wood of Israel...? His concern was always with the sufferings others would experience rather than being lost in His own introspection. Without getting too deeply involved in the actual exposition, a simple lesson emerges: He was not so overpowered by the terrible physicality of His human situation that He ceased to be spiritually aware. His mind was full of the word, not just out

of place quotations flooding His subconscious, but real awareness of the spirit of the Father's word and its' intensely personal relevance to Himself. In this He sets a matchless example.

*With the noise of a great tumult he has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken-* I explained on Jer. 10:8 that the wooden idols were likened to the kindling wood, as it were stacked around Jerusalem. God kindled the fire, although it sounded like ["with the noise of..."] the invaders had done so. He worked through them. Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). God "broke" the tree of Israel (s.w. Jer. 25:29), but so did the invaders. The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4).

*Jeremiah 11:17 For Yahweh of Armies, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you-* They were planted by God when they left Egypt and entered covenant with God (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), and also when they entered Canaan and God cleared the land of the Canaanite tribes (Ps. 44:2; 80:8). Having done everything possible through their planting that they might produce fruit (Is. 5:2), it was appropriate for God to also destroy them when they failed to respond. Likewise we have been "planted" in a manner and position optimal for our spiritual fruitfulness; we cannot therefore blame our lack of spiritual fruit on bad environment.

*Because of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have worked for themselves in provoking Me to anger by offering incense to Baal-* Judah were continually being reminded by Jeremiah that they were not better than the ten tribe kingdom of Israel, and would meet a similar destruction and exile as they had. They had both produced the judgment for themselves; sin is essentially a sin against ourselves as well as God.

*Jeremiah 11:18 Yahweh gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it: then You showed me their evil deeds-* Jeremiah speaks here of how he came to see Israel for who they were; he realized their conspiracy against God, and also their conspiracy against himself. He was therefore underlined as really being God's representative on earth, emotionally passing through similar experiences. Ezekiel was shown "what the house of Israel is doing in the dark" (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must've been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world- hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and "iron pillar" to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be "dismayed at [the] looks" of those who watched them with anger and consternation (Jer. 1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

*Jeremiah 11:19 But I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter-* On Jer. 10:19 we noted that Jeremiah alludes to the great Messianic prophecy of Is. 53, feeling himself the bearer of Israel's griefs. He continues that allusion here, this time to Is. 53:7 "a lamb to the slaughter". Jeremiah had naively believed they had good intentions, hence GNB "like a trusting lamb". His overly positive view of his people reflected that of God. For the conspiracy against Jeremiah was reflective of that which they had as it were made against Yahweh (:9).

*And I didn't know that they had devised devices against me saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit-* LXX "Come and let us put wood into his bread", suggesting an attempt to poison him. But the destruction of a tree is the figure just used in :16 for the cutting down and burning of the tree of Israel. The idea may be that the tree of Israel was destroyed because of their plot to kill Jeremiah and thus nullify, as they thought, his words. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological. It may be that Jeremiah had earlier specifically been warned that his family were trying to kill him (Jer. 12:6) but he ignored it. This would again be reflected in how Yahweh knew on one hand that His people were conspiring against Him (:9), and yet acted as if He didn't know that, such was His love and hope for them.

*And let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered-* This alludes to Is.

53:8, where the suffering servant is to be cut off out of the land of the living. See on :21. Jeremiah was attempting to be the sin bearer for Israel in the terms of Is. 53. Perhaps this is why many of the prophecies of judgment were ameliorated in their outworking. But their sin was such that his willingness was not enough to save them from condemnation. Or perhaps Jeremiah's struggling spirit against God's ways, which at times does appear in the record (e.g. Jer. 12:1), meant that he was not righteous enough; hence the final fulfilment of Is. 53 in the Lord Jesus and not Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 11:20 But, Yahweh of Armies, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind-* The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

*I shall see Your vengeance on them-* But when he did see this, he bitterly laments over it, in Lamentations. We must be careful what we ask for, lest we receive it. There is more information about Jeremiah's feelings about his persecutors at Jer. 20:10-12. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, and it seems Jer. 11:20 refers to the same time as Jer. 20:10-12.

*For to You have I opened up my cause-* The fact God sees and knows all means that we might as well open our lives up before Him in prayer and meditation. Jeremiah "revealed my cause" before the Lord because he knew that God "tests the heart and the mind". This may be why men like Jeremiah were somewhat 'rough' with God; whatever they felt about God, they told Him. They so knew that God knew their thoughts... there was and is no point in saying fine words to God in prayer, whilst feeling harder about Him in ones heart.

*Jeremiah 11:21 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life saying, You shall not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, that you not die by our hand-* The Lord may have alluded here in saying that a prophet always lacks honour amongst his own people (Mt. 13:57). For as noted on :19, Jeremiah was clearly a type of the rejected Lord Jesus. If we enquire why they had such specific hatred for him, it was clearly because subconsciously they knew themselves to be indeed worthy of death as Jeremiah had been saying. And so they projected their sin onto the innocent, and wished to then punish him with the punishment they knew they themselves deserved. This is why those who secretly commit adultery are often eager to judge and punish others in the church who commit adultery. It's not simply hypocrisy; it's all the same story of psychological transference- of their own sin and desert of punishment onto another.

*Jeremiah 11:22 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine-* This specifically speaks of the people of Anathoth (:21). The children died not because they were punished for the parents' sins, but because sin has collateral damage. That is part of what sin is; the results of it affect others who did not commit that sin.

*Jeremiah 11:23 And there shall be no remnant to them: for I will bring evil on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their visitation-* But by grace there was a remnant left to Judah. God here speaks in the fire of His wrath, but in wrath remembers mercy; although it could be that Anathoth being on the great north road, directly in the line of the Babylonian advance, was indeed totally liquidated and left with no remnant.

## Jeremiah Chapter 12

*Jeremiah 12:1 You are righteous, Yahweh, when I contend with You; yet I would reason the cause with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they at ease who deal very treacherously?-* This is a parade example of how we should approach issues relating to the justice of God; beginning with the simple recognition that Yahweh is righteous, even if we don't understand. This prophecy appears to have been at the time of Josiah, when Judah were still relatively at ease and prospering, despite Josiah's reforms not having been deeply responded to.

*Jeremiah 12:2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bring forth fruit-* This planting is that of Jer. 11:17. They were planted by God when they left Egypt and entered covenant with God (Ex. 15:17; Num. 24:6), and also when they entered Canaan and God cleared the land of the Canaanite tribes (Ps. 44:2; 80:8). Having done everything possible through their planting that they might produce fruit (Is. 5:2), it was appropriate for God to also destroy them when they failed to respond. Likewise we have been "planted" in a manner and position optimal for our spiritual fruitfulness; we cannot therefore blame our lack of spiritual fruit on bad environment.

*You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart-* This can be translated as them saying "You are near" with their mouths, when in fact they were far from God in their heart. This statement "You are near" was based on the much loved Dt. 4:7, which states that no God has Israel so "near" them (s.w.). Indeed Yahweh was near them- but they had to come near to Him in their hearts. He was "near" in that His word was to be near in their hearts and not far off from their hearts (Dt. 30:11,14 s.w.), but they were refusing His word through Jeremiah. The nearness of God is therefore potential, for man in response must also draw near unto Him (Ez. 42:13; 43:19 s.w.). But the grace of God was such that He would save them even from "far off" (Jer. 30:10 s.w.). See on Jer. 23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

*Jeremiah 12:3 But You, Yahweh, know me; You see me, and try my heart towards You: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter-* This is just how Jeremiah describes himself, a lamb for the slaughter, in Jer. 11:19. There he was alluding to the prophecy of the suffering servant in Is. 53. But the significance is that *they* were the condemned lamb for the slaughter, and the state of Jeremiah's heart was different; he was not for the slaughter. But he willingly identified with Israel's sin and condemnation whilst being personally sinless in this matter- a fine type of the Lord's representative sufferings and sin bearing for us on the cross.

*Jeremiah 12:4 How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the whole country wither? for the wickedness of those who dwell therein, the animals are consumed, and the birds-* And yet the wicked people of :1 apparently prospered. So we may be reading the present tense spoken of as the future. And yet actually all animals weren't consumed from off the land. In wrath God remembered mercy, by His amazing grace. See on Jer. 10:18.

*Because they said, He shall not see our latter end-* They said this in their hearts; they psychologically assumed that God did not "see" their behaviour nor foresee a final judgment for them.

*Jeremiah 12:5 If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? and though in a land of peace you are secure, yet how will you do in the swelling of the Jordan?-* The land was not in peace at the time of many of Jeremiah's prophecies, and so this must be an earlier prophecy. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological. The prediction that his own family would seek to kill him (:6) was therefore made early in his ministry, but he apparently disbelieved this word (Jer. 11:19). The idea was that the Jordan was going to swell up, rather than be under their control as it was when they first entered Canaan. The previous incursions of the Babylonians were as foot soldiers compared to the cavalry which were to pour into the land. This is God's response to Jeremiah's apparent complaint in :4 that the judgments were too severe. He is at this point personally out of step with God's judgment program; and so God reminds him that his very own family were intending to kill him (:6). Jeremiah had an overly positive view of Israel, but he was also even in that reflecting God's love and imputation of righteousness to His wayward people.

*Jeremiah 12:6 For even your brothers, and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have cried aloud after you: don't believe them, though they speak beautiful words to you-* See on :5; Jer.

11:19. Jeremiah was sharing God's experiences with His people, who had dealt treacherously with Him too (s.w. Is. 48:8; Jer. 3:8,11; 5:11; 9:2), as Jeremiah himself recognized (:1). To Jeremiah's face they were nicely spoken, but behind his back they cried for his blood. Likewise with their God, they had Him on their lips but their hearts were far from Him (:2).

*Jeremiah 12:7 I have forsaken My house, I have cast off My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies-* This and the following verses are God's response as to how He would respond to the treachery of His own people. But this :7 may be Jeremiah's response, which (as often in Jeremiah) merges into the feelings of God too and then God becomes the dominant thinker and speaker rather than Jeremiah. In this case, Jeremiah would be responding that he had dissociated himself from his family, and had resigned his dearly beloved, perhaps his wife, to destruction because she too refused to respond to his message. Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

*Jeremiah 12:8 My heritage has become to Me as a lion in the forest: she has uttered her voice against Me-* It was appropriate therefore that her invaders would be as lions, uttering their voice against her; for this was how they had treated God. Judgment is but an extension of how we ourselves have acted.

*Therefore I have hated her-* A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

*Jeremiah 12:9 Is My heritage-* To lose an inheritance was a major tragedy in the thought of those times. God was losing His inheritance in that He was allowing it to be consumed, 'polluting it' (Is. 47:6). No man would ever spoil his own inheritance like this; but God did, such was His belief in the need to punish His people for their sins. And yet the metaphor of lost / spoiled inheritance reflects how painful this was for God, felt as a personal loss. The whole idea elicits sympathy for God in this tragic loss. See on :10.

*To Me as a speckled bird of prey? Are the birds of prey against her all around? Go, assemble all the animals of the field, bring them to devour-* The rhetorical question was because this situation need not be, if Judah repented. As it was, God's people were like a different coloured bird which attracted the aggression of the other birds. It then is brought to the ground and the animals come to devour it. There was something perceived as different about Judah, the root of all anti-Jewish sentiment down the centuries. And this attracted others to attack that which was different. But the difference was not in their spirituality; it was perhaps in their manic desire to be like other nations. Israel was "speckled" or dyed with multiple different colours, like pagan idol worshipping clothes (s.w. Jud. 5:30). The anger of the nations with Judah was that she had made covenants of unique loyalty with each of them, on the agreement that Judah would worship their gods. And now they discovered she had made such agreements with them all, and the Jerusalem temple was full of the idols of the various nations. This was the basis for their combined anger with her. See on :12.

*Jeremiah 12:10 Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness-* At this time, Judah was still prosperous (see on :1). The past tenses indicate that what God threatened He was now going to fulfil, and it was as good as done. The vineyard of Israel had been carefully planted and prepared by God (Is. 5). For God to allow His own vineyard to be destroyed was therefore a huge personal loss to Him. See on :9,11.

*Jeremiah 12:11 They have made it a desolation; it mourns to Me, being desolate; the whole land is made desolate, because no man lays it to heart-* The desolation of the land is not specifically predicated upon idolatry, but upon not laying things to heart; a light hearted, not serious attitude to the things of God. This was of paramount pain and significance to God, and it remains so to this day. That the land should be desolate was a personal tragedy to God (s.w. Ex. 23:29); as noted on :9,10, God's judgment of His people was at huge personal loss to Himself.

*Jeremiah 12:12 Destroyers have come on all the bare heights in the wilderness; for the sword of Yahweh devours from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh has peace-* And yet at the time of the prophecy, perhaps still in Josiah's time, the land was in peace (:5). The present tense is used for the future, so certain was it of fulfilment. The "destroyers" are the invaders, and yet it was the shepherds of Israel who are the destroyers in :10. Jeremiah was from the priestly family, and perhaps their hatred for him (:6) was because of his criticism of them. The high places, where Judah thought they could secretly worship idols, were going to be destroyed; it was Judah's promiscuous relationship with multiple nations and idols which provoked the anger of the invaders. See on :9.

*Jeremiah 12:13 They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns-* The Lord may have had His eye on this in constructing the parable of Mt. 13:27. The wheat sown didn't produce wheat because an enemy sowed thorns amongst the wheat which eclipsed the wheat. So the idea is that although they sowed wheat, they had also sown thorns, and these had eclipsed what apparent spirituality they had. Only a wholehearted devotion to God can succeed in spiritual life.

*They have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing: and you shall be ashamed of your fruits, because of the fierce anger of Yahweh-* Although they had been given materially all that they needed on entering the land (Jer. 2:7), the attraction of the idols was "profit". The idols of Canaan were fertility cults, and they were worshipped in the hope of good harvests and material benefits or "profit". They worshipped them with the "pain" of offering their firstborn to them. But the same word is used of the grief or pain which the representative Saviour would experience for them (Is. 53:10), bearing every aspect of their condemnation. So Yahweh's blessing of His people materially only elicited in them a craving for yet more materialism, and they turned to the idols- which in reality did not "profit", for all such blessing is only from Yahweh. In the day of condemnation, they would look at the few "fruits" they thought they had gained due to idol worship, and be ashamed that they sought them at the expense of eternity. And so it shall be for all materialists in that day.

*Jeremiah 12:14 Thus says Yahweh against all My evil neighbours-* Even in the midst of condemning His people, God closely identifies with them, speaking here of the surrounding nations as "*My neighbours*". This is typical of the prophetic revelations of condemnation.

*Who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit-* Whoever touches Israel touches the apple of God's eye, such is His extreme sensitivity towards His people even when they are under condemnation (Zech. 2:8).

*Behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them-* Potentially, there was huge Divine power available to those who repented in exile and wanted to return. The decree of Cyrus is evidence enough. But the majority preferred the soft life of Babylon. We too are commanded to come out from Babylon, and if we even nod a "yes" toward that, we will be hugely confirmed in it.

*Jeremiah 12:15 It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his inheritance, and every man to his land-* This implies that those taken captive would themselves return. The exact duration of the exile was always an open question. Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only

ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. See on Ez. 6:8.

But the people in view (and this depends upon translation) could refer to the Gentile invaders. It was God's intention that they should return to their own lands experiencing God's compassion. But the Jews mixed with the people of the land, they didn't teach them the Name, and so the prophecy didn't come true- they weren't built up in the midst of Israel as intended (:16). Prophecies like Is. 19:18,24 were thereby disabled from fulfilment at that time- "In that day there shall be five cities in the land of Egypt that... swear to the Lord... in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria". Is. 2:2-4, Zech. 8:21-23 etc. speak of how Gentile nations would desire to learn the ways of God and come up to a temple in Zion for this purpose. Could it not be that these passages are to be read in the context of Jer. 12:14-17- that all this was only possible if at the time of the restoration the nations had learnt God's ways from the Jews? In this case these passages are not to be taken as 'proof' that there has to be a future temple built in Zion.

*Jeremiah 12:16 It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, As Yahweh lives; even as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of My people-* See on :15. The *if...then* construction in :15-17 is clearly conditional: the Gentiles could have come and dwelt in the land in a Kingdom-like situation, if Judah had taught them, and if they had responded. "The ways of My people" were by implication the ways of Yahweh. If Judah been obedient, then they would have been a witness to the nations where they were carried captive, and they too would have repented, become Jews, and been "built up in the midst of My people", incorporated into God's revived, refined Israel. The future building up of a replanted Israel in their land would have meant their building up too (s.w. Jer. 24:6; 31:28; 33:7). But so much potential was wasted because of the lack of human repentance.

*Jeremiah 12:17 But if they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says Yahweh-* This sounds like the total end of Israel as a nation. But that didn't happen, even though they did not hear. They were not plucked up and destroyed. God did not cast away His people (Rom. 11:2). The God whose love is so strong that He even doesn't carry out the judgments He threatens... is a God of love and grace to the ultimate term. If the impoverished remnant who remained in the land had been obedient, then they would not have been plucked up (Jer. 42:10). They were not obedient, and yet still God preserved His people.

## Jeremiah Chapter 13

*Jeremiah 13:1 Thus said Yahweh to me, Go, and buy yourself a linen belt, and put it on your waist, and don't put it in water-* The belt represented Israel (:11); being unwashed perhaps speaks of their lack of spiritual cleansing and uncleanness. He had to "buy" it as Yahweh had redeemed or bought Israel out of Egypt. Linen, not woollen, garments were appointed for priestly wear; the idea is that all Israel were to be a nation of priests, a light to the Gentiles. Or maybe the command not to wash it is just so that it would cleave to Jeremiah over time, representing the intimacy and close connection intended between God and Israel.

*Jeremiah 13:2 So I bought a belt according to the word of Yahweh, and put it on my waist-* There is an Arabic saying that a man's people cling to him as a man's belt. That seems to be the idea in view in this acted parable.

*Jeremiah 13:3 The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying-* This was some time after Jeremiah had been wearing the belt every day; see on :2.

*Jeremiah 13:4 Take the belt that you have bought, which is on your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock-* The removal of the belt meant that God was severing His special relationship with His people, whom He considered intimately part of Him; see on :2. The hiding in the rock represented how Judah would be in captivity. It's not clear whether Jeremiah literally made this journey. If he did, it would have been a major undertaking, and all would have known about it. However, if an actual visit to the Euphrates is meant, the part referred to "cannot be anywhere near Babylon, where there are no 'rocks,' or rather 'crag's"—but in the upper part of its course, above Carchemish, or even above Samosata, where it still flows between rocky sides". Hiding in a cleft of the rock recalls Moses; he did so in order to see the glory of Yahweh. There is a similar idea in Is. 2:10. The implication was that through this experience, the bringing down of all human pride, then the glory of Yahweh would be revealed at the restoration, as it was to Moses. And that is very much the language of Ezekiel's cherubim visions which were given around this time.

*Jeremiah 13:5 So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as Yahweh commanded me-* The Lord Jesus spoke a parable about a man who buried his talent (the Truth he had received at baptism) in the earth, and then when he was condemned at the judgment, this man thinks he's being treated unfairly. This story was quarried from Jer. 13:5-10, where God tells Jeremiah to take a belt and bury it. It becomes spoilt and useless. This buried belt, according to God's own interpretation, represents those of His people "which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart". It was this which destroyed them, making them spiritually rot and decay until they were of no use. The Lord Jesus seems to foresee in His parable those who would accept His Truth, but bury it in the ground, effectively forgetting the love of His word, and yet assuming that simply because they possess the Truth they ought therefore to be in the Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 13:6 It happened after many days that Yahweh said to me, Arise, go to the Euphrates and take the belt from there, which I commanded you to hide there-* The taking of the belt spoke of God's taking of His people out of captivity once their pride had been destroyed (:9). If indeed Jeremiah made the literal journey to the Euphrates, then it would have appeared a huge effort in order to teach a simple lesson about God's hatred of pride. But that was the point. All this was to prove that God hates pride and will go to any extreme length in order to remove it from His people. See on :9.

*Jeremiah 13:7 Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and took the belt from the place where I had hidden it; and behold, the belt was ruined, it was unfit for use-* Ezekiel taught the same lesson in likening Judah to a vine branch which had been burnt at the hands of the Babylonians, and was therefore unfit for use (Ez. 15:2-4). We assume that Jeremiah was to wear the useless belt on the long journey back to Judah. Losing our pride (:9) means recognizing we cannot do any work for the Lord, in the sense that all human achievement is nothing; and yet He still wears us, He uses us, He identifies with us. The Hebrew for "dig" also means to search out; God would search out His scattered, humbled people and return them to His land (s.w. Dt. 1:22; Josh. 2:2). "Ruined" is the word for 'destroyed' in :14 and often. They would be destroyed in the sense that their pride would be destroyed (:9). This was the positive outcome of 'rotting away' in exile (Lev. 26:39 NET).

*Jeremiah 13:8 Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The whole point of Judah's exile in Babylon was to make them "ruined, unfit for use" like the cloth which Jeremiah buried by Euphrates (Jer. 13:7). And yet the second half of Isaiah is full of expressions of God's desire to use Israel after their experience in Babylon as His witness to the nations. Israel's preparation for their mission was through being made "unfit for use". And so God prepares His missionaries and ambassadors today likewise.

*Jeremiah 13:9 Thus says Yahweh, In this way I will ruin the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem-* See on :6. It was pride in the heart which was the essential problem; all the idolatry and immorality flowed from that. And this is the abiding lesson for us. As noted on :7, God would ruin or destroy His people in the sense of destroying their pride. This was the intention of the captivity; and only then could God bring them back to Judah attached to Him, just as Jeremiah returned with the useless belt. It is not specifically stated that he returned with the belt because it was an open question as to whether the exiles would shed their pride. The reality is that they didn't, yet by pure grace God still tried to bring them back; such was and is His desire to as it were fore through His saving purpose with people.

*Jeremiah 13:10 This evil people, who refuse to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and are gone after other gods to serve them and to worship them-* The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

*Shall even be as this belt, which is profitable for nothing-* Jeremiah's parable of the girdle demonstrated that the Jews would not "prosper" (Jer. 13:7,10) even when taken into captivity at the Euphrates (i.e. Babylon), using the same word as in the parable of the vine in Ez. 17:9. Babylon, according to Ez. 17:8, was potentially fruitful soil for their spiritual revival. But they would not "prosper", Jeremiah says, because of their deep seated love of idolatry and lack of true repentance.

*Jeremiah 13:11 For as the belt clings to the waist of a man, so have I caused to cling to Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, says Yahweh; that they may be to Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear-* There is an Arabic saying that a man's people cling to him as a man's belt. That seems to be the idea in view in this acted parable. God caused His people to cling to Him, perhaps referring to marriage (s.w. Gen. 2:24); and yet their pride meant that they refused it. This speaks of the psychological work of God to cause His people to cling to Him, which is likewise ongoing today. We note that Israel and Judah are mentioned together; the idea was that the restoration would unite both nations through the common experience of being humbled and repenting. The two nations would return to the land and this become God's singular people. This was God's intention from the start, but it was their pride (:9) which caused them not to "hear".

*Jeremiah 13:12 Therefore you shall speak to them this word: Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall tell you, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine?* - This continues the theme of the earlier parable of the belt, which had to be marred before it would be useless enough for God to use. This spoke of how Judah would lose their pride in Babylon (:9), or that was the intention. "Bottle" here of course means not a glass bottle but a bag or wine skin; but the Hebrew word essentially means that which is deflated, alluding to how wine skins deflated. It is used of the "fading" of human pride in Judah (Is. 28:1,4; 40:7,8; 64:6). This is the continuation of theme with the fading pride of :9. Those humbled skins could have been filled with the wine of the new covenant; but they were to be filled with the wine of judgment (:13). To be given wine from Yahweh is a double symbol; either of condemnation, as happened later to Babylon as well (Is. 51:23; Jer.

25:15); or of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). They of course chose to understand it as the symbol of blessing, saying that of course they knew the skins were to be filled with wine. But the wine was in fact to be a symbol of judgment (:13). This double symbol explains how the communion service can bring us up sharp before the two options in our destiny- to drink to our condemnation, or to our eternal blessing. This is why self examination is naturally elicited by it.

*Jeremiah 13:13 Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings who sit on David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness-* The royal family and leadership are bracketed along with "all the inhabitants of the land". Leadership does what the masses want; leaders exercise the natural human tendency to quickly perceive what the other wishes to hear and to say and do it. This is what had happened in Judah. The "people love to have it so", and therefore the priests and prophets said what the people wanted to hear (Jer. 5:31). This is why all society was to be punished. The wine of the covenant was to become the drunkenness of condemnation for them.

*Jeremiah 13:14 I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, says Yahweh: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have compassion, that I should not destroy them-* See on :24. They would be a source of mutual destruction. we bite and devour each other, we may be consumed by each other (Gal. 5:15)- this is the same idea of brethren killing brethren. Israel were condemned to destruction by brother being dashed against brother (Jer. 13:14). Indeed, biting and devouring each other is a quotation from Is. 9:19,20 LXX (although not apparent in the AV), where Israel in their judgment for unfaithfulness would bite and devour each others' bodies in the siege. Paul is saying that if we bite and devour each other with our words (and we are all guilty of this at times), we are acting as the condemned. If we do this, we may well be consumed of each other- and this *may* have a terribly literal fulfilment, in that as the world destroys every man his neighbour in the confusion of the last day, so the rejected may do the same, living out the bigotry and passive anger they felt towards each other in their ecclesial life. This all needs some meditation. For there are very few of us not caught up in some division, personality clash, biting or devouring.

*Jeremiah 13:15 Hear, and give ear; don't be proud; for Yahweh has spoken-* Jeremiah had just made a journey to Euphrates and back as part of an acted parable appealing for humility (:9). And so he now begs them not to be proud; but rather to be humble before God's word. God has spoken, and that itself is the imperative to not be proud. We can hear the Bible explained and at that point *understand* intellectually. But this is something different to real understanding; for if we truly apprehend the message, we will receive it deep within us and keep that understanding ever present in our subsequent actions. We are to hear *and* give ear to God's word. We can hear on a surface level, but not give the ear of our heart to God's voice.

*Jeremiah 13:16 Give glory to Yahweh your God, before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, He turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it gross darkness-* The land was to return to its state before creation, covered with gross darkness. But even in this language of judgment there is hope of new creation, through the movement of the Spirit. Giving glory to God to avoid this meant being humble (:9,15). This is the great paradox- that our humility and repentance exalts God.

*Jeremiah 13:17 But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and my eye shall weep bitterly, and run down with tears, because Yahweh's flock is taken captive-* This continues Jeremiah's desperate plea for humility (:16). He uses the present tense "is taken captive" although it was yet future, because so certain was the condemnation for pride. And yet they were to go into captivity even then as "Yahweh's flock", they were still His. The fact others reject our message ought likewise to pain us at the very core and heart of our beings. Perhaps here we have a private soliloquy of Jeremiah. He would hide away and weep for them, and nobody would ever know. His grief was to be deeply personal ("my soul shall weep") and unperceived by others ("in secret places"). And I challenge us, each one: have we ever done this, or even come near it, in our frustration with those who reject our message? Jeremiah wept. He didn't "...not care a rush". For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. "I abhor the pride of Jacob", Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah here weeps in secret, his eyes running with tears, "for your pride". Isaiah gets passionate about the way that Assyria thought that "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom" (Is. 10:13). Because Ephraim trusted in his wealth, the most awful words of judgment are pronounced upon him (Hos. 12:8; 10:13,14). We shrug when we

see pride and trust in wealth. Rich or poor, we all tend to trust in money. Thinking that that's life... under the sun. But the prophets went ballistic about this. We've developed established patterns of indifference to this kind of thing. But the prophet's consciences were keenly sensitive to these patterns, and they openly challenged them. They weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience.

*Jeremiah 13:18 Say to the king and to the queen mother-* This could refer to Jehoiakim and the queen-mother Zebidah (2 Kings 23:36). But more likely it refers to the three months' reign of his successor, Jehoiachin, whose mother, Nehushta, is referred to in 2 Kings 24:8,12,15. The mother is mentioned because Jehoiachin was so young (cp. Jer. 22:26).

*Humble yourselves, sit down; for your headdresses have come down, even the crown of your glory-* Come down is the idea of humbling. The pride of man will be humbled by Yahweh; if we refuse to humble ourselves, then God's condemnation of us in the day of judgment will humble us. Therefore it is logical to humble ourselves now. LXX gives: "come down from your head is your beautiful crown". We noted on :1 that all Israel were intended to be a nation of priests and even God's High Priest for the surrounding nations. But they were to now lose that possibility. Perhaps Jeremiah is even asking them to resign from the throne in recognition of their corruption, so that the line of David might be restored in the restored Kingdom which was then potentially possible.

*Jeremiah 13:19 The cities of the South are shut up, and there is none to open them: Judah is carried away captive, all of it; it is wholly carried away captive-* LXX "Complete removal". But this didn't happen to this extent; see on Jer. 10:18. Perhaps at this point the Babylonian advance had already surrounded the southern cities, and the captivity of the people was as good as done, hence the use of the present tense about something yet future. There was none to open the besieged, shut up cities; because the power of Egypt upon whom they hoped had been broken; see on :19. This is why "the cities of the south" are mentioned, for being nearer to Egypt, they had particularly hoped upon Egyptian help.

*Jeremiah 13:20 Lift up your eyes, and see those who come from the north: where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?-* The flock which disappeared may refer to how the army of Egypt, upon whom Judah (LXX mentions "Jerusalem" specifically here) had trusted for defence against Babylon "from the north", was destroyed at the battle of Carchemish (BC 605). This may have just happened when Jeremiah said this. This was why there was now nobody to open the cities which were closed up because of the siege; the Egyptians were not going to lift the siege (:19).

*Jeremiah 13:21 What will you say, when He shall punish you?-* "Punish" translates two words, 'to be overseer over'. The allusion is to their bondage in Egypt, to which they were to effectively return in Babylonian captivity.

*You have provoked them to be captains and rulers over you-* The "them" are the northern invaders seen in :20. "Captains and rulers" sounds like Israel's slavery in Egypt. They were to as it were return to Egypt (Hos. 8:13; 9:3). This is why the language of the restoration prophecies, especially in later Isaiah, allude to the exodus from Egypt. Judah had done what their fathers had done- returned in their hearts to Egypt. They therefore as it were appointed the invaders as their captains and rulers over them.

*Shall not sorrows take hold of you, as of a woman in travail?-* Although this a metaphor for judgment, it includes the hope that new birth was to come out of all these sufferings. Always God had in view His hope for the rebirth of His people.

*Jeremiah 13:22 If you say in your heart, Why are these things come on me?-* Ezekiel addresses this same complaint in Ez. 18, that the judgments are unjust. God's response is simply to remind them of how terribly they are to be judged- and that ought to elicit within their own consciences an awareness of what they had done to deserve this. The level of shameless self-justification is extreme; so extreme that we reflect it could only have arisen from allowing themselves to be utterly convinced that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols, and that the

words of the false prophets were those of God. But this utter conviction was not simply a case of intellectual failure or being misled by their teachers. It had a strong moral basis to it; in that they were believing what they wanted to believe, in order to justify their lusts.

*For the greatness of your iniquity are your skirts lifted up, and your private parts suffer violence-* Her lovers, those she had depended upon, would become her enemies and destroyers (Ez. 23:22). The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (Jer. 13:20-27), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (Ez. 23:34). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (Ez. 16:7,10); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (Ez. 16:37; 23:22-49); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (Ez. 23:8,20). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment- and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism.

*Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil-* This is in response to their question in :22, as to why they were being punished. No specific sin is listed, but rather the complaint is that they had become psychologically dominated by their ways and habitual ("accustomed") paths of thought. Once habit solidifies, it becomes effectively part of our nature and almost impossible to change, at least in human strength. The Hebrew translated "accustomed" carries the idea of repeated habit. The Hebrew idea of 'teaching' is connected to the words for 'habit' or 'custom'; because teaching was by repetition. The Lord Jesus "morning by morning" heard God's word "as the learned" (Is. 50:4); but the Hebrew words for "accustomed" in Jer. 13:23 and "learned" in Is. 50:4 are the same. God teaches by repetition- which may be out of vogue in the experience / problem based learning philosophy of current education, but it's God's way.

*Jeremiah 13:24 Therefore will I scatter them, as the stubble that passes away, by the wind of the wilderness-* The "stubble" doesn't refer to what is left in the ground after harvest. Here it refers to the broken straw which had to be separated from the wheat after the corn had been trampled out by the oxen. Sometimes it was burnt as useless; at other times left to be blown away by the wind coming from the desert. The idea is that whatever was left after the trampling of the Babylonians, even that would be blown away by the wind out of the land and into captivity. But by grace this didn't happen, because the poor of the land, the majority, were left there. See on Jer. 10:18.

Dan. 2:44 describes how the kingdoms of this world will be broken and scattered as the chaff before the wind. Yet this is exactly the language of Jer. 13:24 concerning Israel's latter destruction. They will be "dashed" (Jer. 13:14) as the nations of the world will be (Ps. 2:9). The same verse says they will be destroyed by brother being dashed against brother- again, the picture of the world's final destruction (Zech. 14:13). Rev. 2:27 speaks of the unfaithful in the ecclesia likewise being dashed to pieces. The Lord's coming will be a stone that grinds them to powder (Mt. 21:44).

*Jeremiah 13:25 This is your lot, the portion measured to you from Me, says Yahweh; because you have forgotten Me, and trusted in falsehood-* The portion of the wine of judgment was justly measured and it led to the drunkenness of condemnation. But as noted on :24, even that just measure was ameliorated by the grace of a God whose justice incorporates grace. But the judgment measured, "this... your lot", could refer to the mind-set of :24. God confirmed them in their path of rebellious thinking. Rom. 1:28 states this clearly- God gives a "reprobate mind" to those who wish to think in that way. He confirms us by His Spirit, working directly on our hearts, in the way we

choose to go and be.

*Jeremiah 13:26 Therefore will I also lift your skirts up above your face-* The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God; see on :22. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences (See Phyllis Trible, *God And The Rhetoric Of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) pp. 31-71). Just as for a woman to have her skirt ripped above her head and her nakedness displayed was ultimately humiliating for her, so Israel had humiliated God by their sin (Jer. 13:25-27); their actions were just as shocking and obscene.

*And your shame shall appear-* Time and again, Israel were told that through the judgments of punishment they would receive, they would come to know God in truth (e.g. Ez. 25:7. Their own shame was made to appear before their own face by the judgment process (Jer. 13:26 RV). But it is possible for us to come to that knowledge now through a correct response to the word. If only in our self examination now we would "judge (i.e. condemn) ourselves, we would not be judged (condemned)" at the judgment seat (1 Cor. 11:34). The mental effort and organization of time which this requires must surely be worthwhile in the light of this promise.

*Jeremiah 13:27 I have seen your abominations, even your adulteries, and your neighing, the lewdness of your prostitution, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, Jerusalem!-* The sexual violence to be done to her was appropriate to the nature of her sins, which are presented as sexual- in that every act of trust in the surrounding nations, every covenant with them, was adultery against God. The terms of those covenants was that they had to worship the gods of those nations, which they did "on the hills and in the field"; and this therefore was where they had committed their persecution. Their endless "neighing" for the attentions and favours of the Gentiles was to be reflected in the neighing of the horses of their invaders (only s.w. Jer. 8:16).

*You will not be made clean; how long shall it yet be?- LXX* "for thou hast not been purified so as to follow me; how long yet shall it be?". This suggests the longing of God for their repentance.

## Jeremiah Chapter 14

*Jeremiah 14:1 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought-* See on Jer. 17:8. Drought was the specific punishment for serving other gods, and would lead to the destruction of the people (Dt. 11:16,17).

*Jeremiah 14:2 Judah mourns, and its gates languish, they sit in black on the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up-* This could mean that God heard their situation as if it were a prayer, even if unarticulated. The intensity of the drought and famine was to try to get the people to repent, as it was in Elijah's time; so that the even worse blackening of the gates of Jerusalem with fire need not happen at the hands of the Babylonians.

*Jeremiah 14:3 Their nobles send their little ones to the waters: they come to the cisterns, and find no water; they return with their vessels empty; they are disappointed and confounded, and cover their heads-* This again recalls the recorded search for water during the drought of Elijah's time. It was to elicit repentance. The covering of heads in shame and confusion is all language of the exile; they were intended to experience those things through the famine and repent, so that the shame of the exile need not have happened. This is typical of how God works, to this day. To focus solely upon His final execution of judgment and to cry foul is to fail to appreciate all the effort made to *not* have to judge like that.

*Jeremiah 14:4 Because of the ground which is cracked, because no rain has been in the land, the ploughmen are disappointed, they cover their heads-* See on :3. "Cracked" is the word usually translated "dismayed"; and there are multiple exhortations not to be dismayed (Jer. 23:4; 30:10). Judah were dismayed with the dismay of the Gentiles (Jer. 10:2 s.w.). And the state of the land reflected their internal mental condition.

*Jeremiah 14:5 Yes, the hind also in the field calves and forsakes her young, because there is no grass-* Perhaps we are intended to recall that it is the voice of the Lord which makes the hinds to calve (Ps. 29:9); but the lack of grass was a result of a drought which Israel had brought upon themselves. God's word had set up a potential which they refused to allow to come to realization.

*Jeremiah 14:6 The wild donkeys stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail, because there is no greenery to eat-* The impression is of them scanning the countryside from the high places for food. Those high places were where idols had been worshipped as part of fertility cults; and clearly they had failed to deliver on their promises, as all idols do.

*Jeremiah 14:7 Though our iniquities testify against us, work for Your name's sake, Yahweh; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against You-* God had said He would destroy Israel and make of Moses a new nation. But He relented of that, and in Ez. 20:22 we see the picture of His internal struggle, working for His Name's sake, for the sake of the principles incorporated within His Name. So it is an intrinsic part of His Name and essential personality that He changes His judgments from pity. When the Psalmist of Ps. 109:21 asks for God's grace, He asks God to "do" or "work" for the sake of His Name, and not bring about a threatened judgment. Jeremiah likewise understood this and asks God to still be gracious to Israel despite their lack of repentance- through working for His Name's sake (Jer. 14:7). To save by grace was therefore working or doing according to His Name's sake, rather than according to human merit (Ez. 36:22). Thus by working for His Name's sake, the repentant exiles would come to 'know Yahweh' (Ez. 20:44), they would come to see who He essentially is. And He is revealed as the very opposite of a stone faced, unchanging, insensitive God, which was then the standard conception of a deity.

*Jeremiah 14:8 You hope of Israel, its Saviour in the time of trouble, why should You be as a foreigner in the land, and as a wayfaring man who turns aside to stay for a night?-* This could be saying that God seems as disinterested in the land as a traveller passing through a foreign country who only spends a night there in transit. But the idea may be that God was to Israel as a wayfaring man who wanted to lodge with them, but they only let Him stay one night. It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly

questioning His love. Seeing that God is Almighty, and God could have made [and could re-make] His creation to 'understand' and respond in a robot-like way... and seeing God has real and deep emotional feelings... it all makes God almost a tragic figure.

A slightly different slant of interpretation opens when we perceive that the word for "stay" is that used in the phrase "lodging place" in Jer. 9:2, where God says that He wished to leave His people and find a "lodging place in the wilderness for wayfaring men" and spend the night there, away from His adulterous people. Jeremiah here recalls those statements of God in Jer. 9:2, and sees it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men (Jer. 9:2). And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. He elsewhere speaks as if the emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him (Jer. 15:6). This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

*Jeremiah 14:9 Why should You be like a scared man, as a mighty man who can't save? Yet You, Yahweh, are in the midst of us, and we are called by Your name; don't leave us-* The idea of God limiting His omnipotence and also His omniscience explains why God is described as if He suddenly becomes aware of something, makes haste to intervene, or is hurt by sudden apostasy. These ideas are hard to understand if in fact God has total knowledge, i.e. awareness, from the beginning. They either express God to us in human terms; or God limits His omniscience, as He limits His omnipotence, and therefore disallows Himself from foreseeing all our possible futures. The fact is, God 'the Saviour of Israel' can become "as a mighty man that cannot save" by our refusal to accept His salvation (Jer. 14:8,9). God left Himself as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land- so much does He respect our freewill decisions concerning Him, no matter how much they hurt Him.

*Jeremiah 14:10 Thus says Yahweh to this people, Even so have they loved to wander; they have not refrained their feet: therefore Yahweh does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity, and visit their sins-* God's response seems to suggest that Jeremiah's desperate plea for God to remain with them (:9) is out of step with how things really are. The reality is that they had wandered away from Him. They had no applied any self control in going away from Him. See on :12.

*Jeremiah 14:11 Yahweh said to me, Don't pray for this people for their good-* Ez. 22:30 says that if a person had been found at this time who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap', God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" in Ez. 22:30 is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. But there was not such a person, because they were "all" dross (Ez. 22:18,19). Jeremiah was in the land at the time and was surely righteous, but he had been told not to intercede for the people (Jer. 11:14; 14:11). It seems that if another like him had been found, in addition to Ezekiel in exile, then the judgments could have been averted. There were simply so many possible scenarios! And this is what we must expect if even time periods can be shortened or extended in response to human behaviour. And yet Jeremiah himself seems to have been too 'pro' Israel. He was shocked at the depth of their weakness and even naive to it; and in Lamentations he seems to consider God had acted too harshly against His people. So perhaps in any case Jeremiah was not the appropriate interceder.

*Jeremiah 14:12 When they fast, I will not hear their cry-* The command had been for Jeremiah not to pray for the people (:11). But the reason is given that God would not hear *their* prayer. So we see reflected here the way in which *in some circumstances* God is prepared to hear the prayer of a third party as the prayer of the person being prayed for. See on Mk. 2:5. But Judah had moved so far from God that this was now not possible.

*And when they offer burnt offering and meal offering, I will not accept them-* Although in real spiritual terms, Judah had gone far away from God to their idols (see on :10), they still made offerings to Yahweh. But these were unacceptable because they were worshipping other gods and offering to them too at the same time.

*But I will consume them by the sword, by the famine and by the plague-* Judah were in fact not consumed by these things; in wrath God remembered mercy, by grace. See on Jer. 10:18.

*Jeremiah 14:13 Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, the prophets tell them, You shall not see the sword, neither shall you have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place-* Again we sense the overly positive view of Israel held by Jeremiah. It ought to have been intuitively obvious to him that these were not Yahweh's words. And yet Jeremiah apparently enquires of God what is going on. It likewise ought to have been obvious to Judah, with the severe drought upon them, that they already had famine. They were asking a lot of faith from people to believe that their prophecies of "peace in this place" would come true. And yet that promise was also given by the true prophets, word for word the same in Hag. 2:9, requiring faith in it as well. But it was the perversity of human nature to put their faith in a false prophecy.

*Jeremiah 14:14 Then Yahweh said to me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name; I didn't send them, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke I to them: they prophesy to you a lying vision and divination, a thing of nothing and the deceit of their own heart-* "A thing of nothing" is the language of idols. This is how the Hebrew word is usually translated. Their false prophecies were therefore connected with idolatry. They claimed that the idols of Babylon and the nations were inspiring them with messages of peace. That Babylon should come and destroy them, the very opposite of peace, was an appropriate judgment. Yet they made these prophecies in Yahweh's Name. We see here how they claimed that their idolatry was all sanctioned by Yahweh and was a form of worshipping Him.

*Jeremiah 14:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name and I didn't send them, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed-* Whilst the deaths of the false prophets is not recorded, we can assume that this judgment was not ameliorated as that upon the entire society was (see on :12). The anger of Judah's "lovers" was because she had promised total loyalty to them and their gods; but then they discovered Judah had made such agreements with many nations, and the Jerusalem temple was full of idols of various nations. We can understand therefore that the priests and prophets would have been particularly targeted by the invaders, and indeed would have been slain by the sword.

*Jeremiah 14:16 The people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them- them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness on them-* Sin is its own judgment; the judgment / punishment is likened here to their own sin. The judgment of the teachers / prophets is paralleled with that of their hearers. It wasn't simply that the masses were genuinely misled. The teachers taught what they perceived their audience wanted to hear, and this explains why teacher and listener alike were condemned. And yet when the people were cast out in the streets of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, the true prophet, laments as if this judgment is somehow unreasonable (e.g. Lam. 2:21). I feel that whilst the human tragedy was enough to make anybody cry "Too much!", Jeremiah is here out of step with the God who had inspired him to make just this prophecy in places like Jer. 14:16.

I have noted several times that the prophesied judgments in Jeremiah differ from each other; he has also predicted that there would be such mass destruction that there would be nobody to bury the dead, for all would be slain (Jer. 14:16). But Jer. 19:11 speaks of burying bodies in Topheth. These different scenarios didn't all come true. There were various prophetic options, according to the exact measure of Israel's repentance and Jeremiah's intercession; or perhaps, simply according to the pity which Yahweh would finally show this sinful people.

*Jeremiah 14:17 You shall say this word to them, Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease-* This could be read as an invitation to repent in tears, in the desperate hope God may yet change His intended judgment; hence LXX "Let your eyes shed tears day and night, and let them not cease: for the daughter of my people has been sorely bruised, and her plague is very grievous". But there is an ambiguity in the text, whereby apparently God is the one who is mourning night and day. Perhaps this is purposeful; they were to mourn as He did, seeing the coming judgments from His perspective, rather than from the human perspective of considering them as just a tragic misfortune. Jeremiah himself entered into this, for he wept night and day for Zion. This passage is alluded to in Lam. 2:18, where Jeremiah appears to ask the remaining Jews in Jerusalem to pray night and day; and yet there too, the grammar is ambiguous. For he may be saying there that they had already done this. The truth was they had not, Jeremiah had done so, but contrary to what he hoped, God was not prepared to accept his tears of repentance and mourning as theirs (see on Jer. 14:11).

*For the virgin daughter of my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous wound-* This is the language of the rape of a virgin. And yet as Jeremiah and Ezekiel have made very clear, Judah had long since given

up her virginity to the nations. So this loss of virginity had been of her own eager choice. The "breach" recalls the breaching of the walls of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 39:2; 52:7); indeed the word seems to have the sense of the rape of a virgin here when we read that the virgin daughter of Zion had been breached (Jer. 14:17). And both Jeremiah and even God, according to Jer. 8:21, felt themselves breached in this breach of God's people and city. This was how closely identified God was with His wicked people; and how much more does He feel with us in Christ, we who at least seek not to live as Judah did at that time...

Like us, Jeremiah didn't consistently have a heart of compassion. Initially he didn't even want to preach to his people. And he even prayed that he would so grieve for them in regard to the message he gave them, that he would cry for them day and night: "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1). And this prayer was heard. For by Lamentations, this is just what he was doing. And if what we read of Jeremiah troubles us, we too can pray for a heart that bleeds, and through the experience of life which the Lord allows us, He will develop such a heart in those who want it. You may be so caught up in your business, your family, your ecclesia even, your web of social contact... that in honest moments, you know that your heart doesn't bleed as it should. You see the needs and pain and struggle of men and women, but it doesn't touch your heart very deeply. Jeremiah may well have been like this; but he prayed for a new heart, and so can you. Jeremiah had actually been commanded by God to have such a level of grief for His people: "Therefore thou shalt say this word unto them; Let mine eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease: for the virgin daughter of my people is broken" (Jer. 14:17). Jeremiah's grief was God's word of care and concern to the people; and so it can be with us. Jeremiah was to be like this, to reflect God's passion for His people; so he prayed that he would have such a heart of true compassion [note that the chapters in Jeremiah are totally out of sequence chronologically]; and in the end, he found it.

In Jer. 6:7, God laments that the continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in His continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. Yet the same word is used here of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

*Jeremiah 14:18 If I go forth into the field, then, behold, the slain with the sword! If I enter into the city, then, behold, those who are sick with famine! For both the prophet and the priest go about in the land, and have no knowledge-* This is Jeremiah looking ahead in faith to the fulfillment of God's words. "Go about..." is the language of trading. Jeremiah blames his own people- the priests and prophets- for the situation. And it was their love of material benefit and gain which led them to their false teachings, and which in turn led the people to accept it so eagerly. They had "no knowledge" in the Hebraic sense of relationship with God. Again we see that the acceptance of false doctrine / understanding is often based on subconscious immoral desires or is predicated upon moral rather than purely intellectual issues.

*Jeremiah 14:19 Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay!*- Again we sense Jeremiah somewhat out of step with God, accusing Him of not giving peace and healing- despite the reasons for that having been specifically stated by God. However he may be quoting the words of the people, which :22 then comments upon. The lack of quotation marks and expected rubric for quotations often makes interpretation of Jeremiah difficult. They "looked for peace" because the false prophets told them that; or perhaps they referred to Isaiah's prophecies of peace in the restored Kingdom of God. The terms of God's covenant had been clear, using the same phrase for 'the soul loathing'; if Israel's soul loathed God's judgments, then His soul would loathe them (Lev. 26:11,15,30,43). They had loathed or literally 'cast away' God their husband (s.w. Ez. 16:45), and so the distance between God and themselves was of their making and initiative.

The level of shameless self-justification is extreme; so extreme that we reflect it could only have arisen from allowing themselves to be utterly convinced that they were serving Yahweh through serving the idols, and that the words of the false prophets were those of God. But this utter conviction was not simply a case of intellectual failure or being misled by their teachers. It had a strong moral basis to it; in that they were believing what they wanted to believe, in order to justify their lusts.

*Jeremiah 14:20 We acknowledge, Yahweh, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned*

*against You-* As noted on :21, the lack of quotation marks and expected rubric for quotations often makes interpretation of Jeremiah difficult. This seems to be God's fantasy about their response of repentance; or these could be Jeremiah's words, hoping that his feelings would be counted as those of the people. But as discussed on :12, he had been specifically told that God was not going to accept this. In which case he was absolutely out of step with God in this matter; for God had said that he should not pray nor reason in this way (see on :11).

Jeremiah earlier has repeated God's request that they "acknowledge iniquity" (Jer. 3:13). But they did not. But here he says that "we" have done so. He either considered that he was representative of the people, or he failed to accept that their acknowledging of iniquity was only on a surface level. Although on one hand Jeremiah is in step with God's feeling and thinking, he comes over so often (especially in Lamentations) as implying that God is unjust. He had an over positive view of his people. They did not "acknowledge iniquity" as required, but he considers they had done.

*Jeremiah 14:21 Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory-* Here we find something wonderful: "Do not abhor us... do not disgrace the throne of Your glory". *We*, weak humans, are paralleled with the throne of God's glory. Although Jerusalem is in mind, Jeremiah seems to understand that God's throne is essentially His repentant people.

*Remember, don't break Your covenant with us-* Jeremiah appears again out of step with God. For he has repeatedly lamented how Israel have broken the covenant. Israel's breaking of the covenant meant that God had therefore broken the covenant (Lev. 26:15,44 s.w.). Idolatry was therefore to "break My covenant" (Dt. 31:20; Ez. 44:7). God's covenant was broken by them. So the issue of God breaking His covenant was not relevant; He had broken His covenant insofar as they had broken it. What was required was their repentance and desperate seeking of a new covenant with God to replace the one they had broken.

*Jeremiah 14:22 Are there any among the vanities of the nations that can cause rain? or can the sky give showers? Aren't You He, Yahweh our God? Therefore we will wait for You; for You have made all these things-* As explained on :20, Jeremiah is apparently assuming that his feelings will be accepted as the peoples'. He indeed waited for Yahweh, but the people did not. As Jeremiah elsewhere has to point out and prophecy, the people continued in their mad devotion to the idols right up to the fall of the city. And those idols were supposed to have been the creators of the various planets. Here Jeremiah appears to deny those idolatrous beliefs by saying that Yahweh alone is their creator and therefore in total control of the rainfall. But in reality the people were still worshipping the various rain gods and planets, in the hope they would give rain. And so Jeremiah was wrong to speak for the people in this way; and he has been specifically told not to do so, as explained on :11,12.

## Jeremiah Chapter 15

*Jeremiah 15:1 Then Yahweh said to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before Me, yet My mind would not be towards this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth-* As discussed on Jer. 14:11,12, things had gone so far with Israel that Jeremiah's words were not to be counted as Israel's, and so in that sense He was not to pray for them. However as noted on Jer. 14:20-22, he attempts to do so. And here we have God's response. He was not going to accept third party intercession and repentance as theirs. Hence the force here of "*then Yahweh said...*". 'Standing before the Lord' refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is "before the Lord"... or merely the sheer and utter vapidness of the modern mind.

God's "soul" (LXX) could not face the people, they were to be cast out of His presence; and therefore no intercessor could stand in His presence representing them. There has to come a moment when the pull of the flow toward the waterfall of condemnation is now too strong, and the plunge is inevitable. It is that moment which perhaps we need to fear more than anything else in human experience. It happened to Israel- their hearts too were hard, and in the end, after a period, God have them over to their hard hearts (Ps. 81:11,12)- the implication being that even whilst He hardened their hearts, He kept them by grace from the full consequences... but in the end, the final inevitable drag towards the waterfall set in. This is why there were times when even repentance, as a change of mind, could not save Jerusalem from destruction (Jer. 4:28; 15:1-9; 16:12; Ez. 7:1-9). This was the moment *after* the inevitable tug towards the waterfall beings, but before the actual plunge. It's Saul cowering before the witch of Endor, lying face down in the dirt that fateful night... and *this* is the human condition we should most dread.

*Jeremiah 15:2 It shall happen, when they tell you, Where shall we go forth? Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity-* The idea may be that they would desire to "go forth", but none would come out of the siege alive apart from a fourth part who would go into captivity. The rest would only come out of the siege of Jerusalem, as it were, to death. But that isn't how it worked out. The various statements of judgment express the various possible scenarios which could have emerged. For they didn't all come true; see on Jer. 10:18.

*Jeremiah 15:3 I will appoint over them four kinds, says Yahweh: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, the birds of the sky and the animals of the land, to devour and to destroy-* LXX "Four kinds of death". But there is no evidence that wild animals killed anyone in Judah. It may have happened, but the idea seems to be that a quarter of the population would be killed by the invaders, and the rest by birds and wild animals. If the animals of the land refer to the local nations killing the Jews, then we would have thought that was included in the category "the sword to kill". So we seem here to have a prediction that three quarters of the population would die at the hand of wild animals- perhaps aggressively searching for food due to the awful drought of Jer. 14, and the abandoning of the countryside. But this didn't happen. As noted on Jer. 10:18, God in wrath remembered mercy, or perhaps allowed a different path of events and potentials to take place. Indeed the very next verse speaks of them being wanderers amongst the nations; which means they were not all to be slain as here threatened. We are meant to understand that there were various potential scenarios which could work out- depending upon the extent of their repentance.

*Jeremiah 15:4 I will cause them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the land because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem-* This removing of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours

which it could have been. The kingdoms of the *eretz* would then be the wild animals of the land of :3. Ezekiel at this time had been careful to explain that the children don't die for the sins of their fathers. They would be punished because they continued in the sins of Manasseh.

*Jeremiah 15:5 For who will have pity on you, Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask of your welfare?- LXX "Who will spare you?".* This is a rhetorical series of questions, each of which is answered in one word: Yahweh. He was the One who would "have pity" upon the exiles although nobody else would (s.w. Ez. 36:21; Joel 2:18; Mal. 3:17). LXX "who will turn back to ask for thy welfare?" suggests therefore that Yahweh did "turn back" or relent. See on :3. The "welfare", Heb. *shalom*, the peace of Jerusalem... is indeed Yahweh's special interest. "Ask" is literally 'to pray', and the same two words are found in Ps. 122:6: "Pray [ask] for the peace [welfare] of Jerusalem".

*Jeremiah 15:6 You have rejected Me, says Yahweh, you have gone backward-* As explained on Jer. 7:21,24, they were confirmed in their backward path by God Himself. "Rejected" is 'cast off'. Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

*Therefore have I stretched out My hand against you and destroyed you-* The hand of God is an Angelic term, and here we see it responsible for the frequent repenting (changing of mind) of God concerning Israel. Frequent repentance is fundamentally not a characteristic of God Himself- "God is not a man, that He should repent" (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam. 15:29).

*I am weary-* This weariness of God is reflected in how in Jer. 9:2, God says that He wished to leave His people and find a "lodging place in the wilderness for wayfaring men" and spend the night there, away from His adulterous people. In Jer. 14:8, Jeremiah here recalls those statements of God, and sees it as tragic that God had felt this way about His people. And indeed it was and is. The desire to leave them was because they were adulterous women and dishonest men (Jer. 9:2). And so the God of all grace, the most surpassingly loving husband, wanted to become an endlessly travelling man, weary of the road, who wanted to just turn in to a one night motel and rest from His weariness. The emotional drain of the relationship wearied Him. This of course is Almighty God adjusting Himself to mortal man, allowing Himself to feel through our limitations.

*With relenting-* God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6). This is likewise the theme of Hosea's emotionally draining relationship with Gomer, which reflected that of Yahweh with Israel (Hos. 11:8).

*Jeremiah 15:7 I have winnowed them with a fan in the gates of the land; I have bereaved them of children, I have destroyed My people; they didn't return from their ways-* And yet they had bereaved themselves of their children by offering them to the idols. The 'destruction' of the people was not literal death; for after it, they still didn't "return from their ways". There is a play upon the word for "return". Israel's return to God would be matched by their return to the land. The exiles didn't repent, and yet by grace God still returned them, so eager was and is He to as it were force through His purpose of grace. The destruction is parallel with the winnowing; the intention was that the judgment would lead to the true corn falling to the ground and the chaff being blown away. But this didn't happen, and so it was reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

*Jeremiah 15:8 Their widows are increased to Me above the sand of the seas; I have brought on them against the mother of the young men a destroyer at noonday-* Attacks were typically made at dawn and not in the heat and

visibility of noon. But the destroyers would be that confident and zealous as to attack and destroy the women at noon. These words are very similar to those of Ps. 137:8,9, where the daughter of Babylon is to be "destroyed" (s.w. "destroyer") and also loose her children. What was done to Zion was to be done to Babylon; which is the theme of Revelation, that the judgments upon Israel are then to be brought upon those who deliver them. All throughout, it is Yahweh who is the "destroyer" through the hand of the surrounding peoples (s.w. Jer. 25:36). This was in radical tension with the idea that a local god is always supportive of his people and always saves them. The God of Israel reveals a sensitivity to sin as fundamental to His character; and therefore He will judge and even destroy His own people rather than save them from their invaders.

*I have caused anguish and terrors to fall on her suddenly-* The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. See on Jer. 16:9. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

*Jeremiah 15:9 She who has borne seven languishes; she has given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day; she has been disappointed and confounded: and their residue will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, says Yahweh-* Instead of being respected and glorified for having had seven children, the woman was ashamed because those children were dead. There is a strong sense of disappointment here, her sun going down before its time. This may refer to how the false prophets were shown to be so shamefully wrong.

*Jeremiah 15:10 Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land!-* Having spoken of the shame of a mother who loses her seven children, Jeremiah now thinks of his own mother, and feels her shame for having given birth to such a "man of strife" as himself. This logical progression of thought concerning the shame of mothers has the ring of psychological credibility to it. This is indeed how Jeremiah would have felt, and again, the Biblical record has every credibility and internal evidence that it is true. "To the whole land" / *eretz* suggests that his messages were taken to the Gentile nations in the land promised to Abraham. God's intention was that they too along with Judah and Israel should repent, and participate in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which He wished to establish.

*I have not lent, neither have men lent to me; yet everyone of them curses me-* The people cursed Jeremiah as people curse one in whose debt they are. By preaching the Truth to people, they become in our debt. Paul used this figure to persuade Philemon, who as his convert was as it were in his eternal debt. Our preaching of the Gospel is not therefore without impact upon the consciences of our hearers. Their apparent disinterest is an act. Every bullet, as it were, hits its target; but people consciously choose not to respond.

*Jeremiah 15:11 Yahweh said, Most certainly I will strengthen you for good; most certainly I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you in the time of evil and in the time of affliction-* The promise of strengthening is a repeat of that made at the start of Jeremiah's ministry. The strengthening was psychological strengthening against their hate and rejection of him. The Hebrew word for 'intercede' means also 'to meet'; every prayer is a meeting with God (Job 21:15; Is. 47:3; 64:5; Jer. 7:16; 15:11). Those who had so hated Jeremiah would come to him begging for his help in mediating with God.

The Hebrew here is difficult. The LXX offers: "Be it so, Lord, in their prosperity; surely I stood before thee in the time of their calamities, and in the time of their affliction, for their good against the enemy". GNB: "LORD, may all their curses come true if I have not served you well, if I have not pleaded with you on behalf of my enemies when they were in trouble and distress". The LXX would suggest that Jeremiah succeeded in interceding before God, and achieved "good" for them, in that his intercession ameliorated the judgments pronounced at the hand of their enemies. This would explain why there are so many different scenarios of judgment given through Jeremiah; but some were ameliorated by his intercession.

*Jeremiah 15:12 Can one break iron, even iron from the north, and brass?- GNB* "No one can break iron, especially the iron from the north that is mixed with bronze". In those days, "iron" was not made as today and was relatively weak. But the Babylonians mixed iron and brass, and this was the hardest metal of its time. We see here how God's word speaks in terms of contemporary understandings and situations, just as the language of demon possession is used in the New Testament.

*Jeremiah 15:13 Your substance and your treasures will I give for a spoil without price, and that for all your sins, even in all your borders- GNB* "The LORD said to me, "I will send enemies to carry away the wealth and treasures of my people, in order to punish them for the sins they have committed throughout the land". But their sins may have been particularly in their borders, for it was from these that they went to the nations surrounding them, seeking relationship and covenants which are portrayed in the prophets as similar to prostitution. The mention of "treasures" could refer to the temple treasures. But it could be that until the drought, Judah had become prosperous under the reforms of Josiah. Yet their wealth is presented as parallel with their sins, which were to be punished by the loss of wealth.

*Jeremiah 15:14 I will make them to pass with your enemies into a land which you don't know; for a fire is kindled in My anger, which shall burn on you- GNB* "it will burn forever". But it didn't. God felt like that, at that time, but the pole of His mercy is stronger, in the end, than that of His rightful anger and judgment.

Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29).

*Jeremiah 15:15 Yahweh, you know; remember me, and visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors; don't take me away in Your long suffering; know that for Your sake I have suffered reproach- God* had promised Jeremiah protection and strength at the start of his ministry, but he clearly doubted this. He felt that he was likely to be killed, and he asks God to save him from this. That salvation was to be according to God's patient long suffering; which may suggest that Jeremiah felt he was worthy of death as a sinner, and it was only of grace and Divine patience that he be spared death.

It seems that Jeremiah was one of several later characters who found inspiration in Samson, and alluded to him in their prayers to God, seeing the similarities between his spirit and theirs: "O Yahweh [Samson only used the Yahweh Name at the end of his life], thou knowest: remember me [as Samson asked to be remembered for good, Jud. 16:28], and visit me, and revenge me of my persecutors ["that I may at once be avenged of the Philistines", Jud. 16:28]... know that for thy sake I have suffered rebuke [the Philistines doubtless mocked Yahweh as well as Samson]. Thy words were found, and I did eat them [cp. Samson loving the word and eating the honey which he "found" in the lion]: and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart... I sat not in the assembly of the mockers... I sat alone because of thy hand [Samson's separation from an apostate Israel]... why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable?" [the finality of his blindness] (Jer. 15:15-17). If these connections are valid, Samson's love of the word was a very big part of his life.

*Jeremiah 15:16 Your words were found, and I ate them- Josiah's* zealous reforms started with reading "the book of the covenant" (2 Kings 23:2), probably the list of curses which were to come for disobedience (2 Kings 22:19 = Lev. 26:31,32). And this book was in some way a joy and rejoicing to Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16). In this sense Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11), and David in the Psalms takes comfort and joy in judgment to come.

Despite this unity of spirit between God and the prophets, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Jer. 20:7 is made a mess of in most translations, because the obvious translation is simply too shocking. Jeremiah complains: "O Lord, thou hast

seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I am seduced; thou hast raped me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Abraham Heschel's translation). Here is Jeremiah saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much- he felt his soul had been raped. And yet in Jer. 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by thy name, O Lord"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (Jer. 6:11). A prophet could only be incensed if God was incensed (Num. 23:8)- such was the bond between them. No wonder these men felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy. But in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah felt he had been raped and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart.

*And Your words were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh, God of Armies-* Jeremiah's lament that the people had no joy or delight in God's word (Jer. 6:10) is the basis for this comment that when *he* found God's words, they were his joy. We might therefore detect there a sense of spiritual superiority over the Jews for whom God's word was not their joy. Jer. 6:10 had spoken of how God's word was a "reproach" to Israel, and here in :15 he laments how he had become a reproach because of his identity with God's word.

LXX is slightly different: "Consume them; and thy word shall be to me for the joy and gladness of my heart: for thy name has been called upon me, O Lord Almighty". The idea would therefore be that if God consumes Jeremiah's enemies, which included his own family, *then* he would find joy and gladness in God's word. But without that, he implies that he saw little personal delight in it. This would have been great weakness; and would fit the impression that in :16-18 Jeremiah sins in what he says, and is challenged to repent of his attitude in :19.

*Jeremiah 15:17 I didn't sit in the assembly of those who make merry, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation-* This was all true in a sense, and alludes to Psalm 1. But Jeremiah is rebuked for his attitude of resenting that he "sat alone" and had kept away from the "assembly" of the rejoicers (Jer. 15:17,19); and so we are to assume that he said these things in resentment that he had had to stand alone amongst men. He resented how he "sat alone" (Lam. 3:28); yet this is the very term used of how Jerusalem was to "sit alone [solitary]" (Lam. 1:1). He was her representative, and yet he seems to have resented that. He was after all being representative of those who had hated him and tried to kill him. As Jeremiah wrongly lamented his own 'sitting alone', so he ought to have perceived that he should not have lamented Jerusalem's likewise.

As we lay awake at night looking up at the lamp fitting, or stare out from the balcony at the city lights, there must have been within each reader a deep sense of this clawing, intrusive loneliness. That search for ourselves, that inner despair, that fear of standing so totally and essentially alone in this world... And I have reason to believe that these kinds of struggles are more common amongst Christians than amongst many others. For we have been separated from this world unto the things of the future Kingdom; there is a deep and natural sense of our 'separation', yet frankly we often don't know how to handle it. But we can end up like Jeremiah here, almost resenting that separation: "I never sat in the company of revelers, never made merry with them; I sat alone because your hand was on me..." . Our essential loneliness, and recognizing it, is what leads us to faith in and relationship with our true Father. The Lord Jesus will not leave us alone as orphans- He will come to us (Jn. 14:18). He does this through "The Comforter", the Spirit of Christ.

*Jeremiah 15:18 Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You indeed be to me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?-* LXX "Why do they that grieve me prevail against me? my wound is severe; whence shall I be healed?". Jeremiah saw no way out from his psychological pain which had arisen from him accepting the perspective of God about Israel. He also saw that his separation from his family (:17) was going to be permanent; as they were so against God, so they would be against him, He was no cure for his broken heart. And this of course represented the feelings of God about Israel. But Jeremiah appears to feel that God has promised him a better experience than this. He felt God was deceitful, a mirage of water in a thirsty land which in reality wasn't there. It was this which was so upsetting to God. For He does not deceive His people. As representative of both God and Judah, the fault was not with God but with Judah; their impenitence was the cause for Jeremiah's perpetually broken heart. This was how God felt. But Jeremiah was tired of feeling that hurt and isolated; he wanted to be a normal person rather than the manifestation of Yahweh. This giving up, being tired of acting for God, of intimate

identity with Him, warranted the strict and condemnatory response of God in :19.

The "waters that fail" may be an allusion to Is. 58:11, where God had promised the faithful that even in drought (which was ongoing at this time, Jer. 14:1), He would be as waters that *don't* fail to His faithful people. "Fail" is s.w. "deceitful". Yet Jeremiah apparently feels that God hasn't come through on this promise; perhaps he resented having to suffer the results of the drought along with the rest of Israel.

*Jeremiah 15:19 Therefore thus says Yahweh, If you return, then I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me-* Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub*- it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to 'turn back' or repent (e.g. Jer. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). Jeremiah had sinned in his words of :16-18. If he returned / repented, then he would be restored. And yet even through this failure, God uses Jeremiah to be representative of Israel. If Israel turned in repentance, then God would return them to their land and restore the kingdom of God in Israel; if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns. Jer. 8:4-6 comment that if one turns from the right road, then they must turn back. We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road- because turning back is so psychologically difficult. And this is the image that God uses here- to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly 'backslide', keep on turning away, from Him- just because that's the course we're set upon.

*If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as My mouth: they shall return to you, but you shall not return to them-* His words of :16-18 are therefore called "base". The word is used for riot, drunkenness and gluttony; this was how God viewed his lack of self control with his words. Although the record of them is in the inspired Bible, those words were not right. We see here the difference between inspiration [of the historical record] and revelation [of Divine truths through His word, which in these particular words of Jeremiah we don't have. But several versions follow the LXX "If thou wilt bring forth the precious from the worthless, thou shalt be as my mouth: and they shall return to thee; but thou shalt not return to them". "The precious" would refer to "the precious sons of Zion" (s.w.), which Jeremiah later laments were slain, and therefore he had not saved (Lam. 4:2). He had not separated the good metal from the dross in his ministry.

In Jer. 15:15, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in Jer. 15:18 accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: "If you [Jeremiah] return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as my mouth" (Jer. 15:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word" (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God.

*Jeremiah 15:20 I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and to deliver you, says Yahweh-* This continues the reassurance to Jeremiah given in :15, in response to his collapse of faith that God would preserve him from the Jewish opposition. God had promised Jeremiah protection and strength at the start of his ministry, but he clearly doubted this. He felt that he was likely to be killed, and he asks God to save him from this. But again we see how Jeremiah is representative of Judah, at least potentially. For had they repented as Jeremiah did (:19), then they would also have found that they were fought against (by the Babylonians) but not prevailed against. And God's promise of deliverance would have been true for them as well as Jeremiah. But there is clearly a double meaning in these words; for they could have come true in that Jeremiah personally was their bronze wall, and then those who fought against "you" (Judah) would not prevail, for the sake of Jeremiah's intercession, acting as a wall between them and their enemies.

*Jeremiah 15:21 I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible-* As noted on :20, the passage could refer to Jeremiah being delivered out of the hand of the "wicked... terrible" Jews (s.w. Jer. 14:16; 33:5); or to their deliverance from the "wicked... terrible" Babylonians as a result of his intercession for them (the words are used of them in Ez. 28:7; 31:12 etc.). Even in his weakness and failure, Jeremiah was still representative of his people.



## Jeremiah Chapter 16

*Jeremiah 16:1 The word of Yahweh came also to me saying-* This appears to continue from the previous chapter, where Jeremiah has been rebuked and is told that he must repent and continue his mediation. This perhaps is why he is asked here to make himself representative of condemned Judah in a very personally demanding way.

*Jeremiah 16:2 You shall not take a wife, neither shall you have sons or daughters in this place-* This is not to say Jeremiah had never had a wife; she may have died in one of the earlier Babylonian invasions. The reason given is that she and their children were likely to be killed. Whether that was of itself a reason not to marry isn't quite the point; Jeremiah was to live out an acted parable in order to demonstrate the reality of judgment to come. He was demonstrating his connection with God's people, both Judah and the ten tribes. For the allusion is to Hos. 9:9: "Ephraim is bringing forth his children to the murderer". To not have children was a form of death for people of that age. 1 Cor. 7:26 appears to allude here, where Paul advises that in the tribulation of the last days of AD70, it would be better not to have wife and children.

*Jeremiah 16:3 For thus says Yahweh concerning the sons and concerning the daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them, and concerning their fathers who became their father in this land-* This would imply that Jeremiah should not have a family, because if he did then he too would die, as only the single, unmarried would escape. But that doesn't quite ring true to the situation. Jeremiah is being asked to act out a kind of parable in which he is representative of the people; see on :1.

*Jeremiah 16:4 They shall die grievous deaths: they shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground; and they shall be consumed by the sword and by famine; and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth-* Jeremiah was told not to have a family, lest this happen to him. That would imply that all families would be destroyed. But this scale of devastation simply didn't happen. Within Jeremiah's prophecies, there are many different variations on the amount of judgment. The reality was that in wrath, God remembered mercy. See on Jer. 10:18.

*Jeremiah 16:5 For thus says Yahweh, Don't enter into the house of mourning, neither go to lament, neither bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people, says Yahweh, even loving kindness and tender mercies-* Jeremiah was commanded not to make lamentation for the punishment of his people. But he did, and God inspired the record of them in Lamentations, and because they are inspired words, He spoke through those words to all subsequent generations. The reason for this was that God's covenant, referred to as "kindness and mercy", was broken; they were not at peace with Him. And so they should not be pitied in their death. And yet although the covenant was broken by Israel, and God broke His side of it in response to that... He in fact still treated them as His covenant people. This is not to say that God is not serious about His statements. He is; but His love, grace and pity is displayed as the more extraordinary, in that it leads Him to break the words and threats spoken in justifiable and understandable wrath. For the same Hebrew phrase "loving kindness and tender mercies" is used again by Jeremiah in Lam. 3:22, where he reflects that these have not been withdrawn from God's people, even though Zion is now in ruins.

*Jeremiah 16:6 Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them-* When we read that those who were to die in the land due to the Babylonian invasion would not be buried "neither shall men lament for them", this sounds like a prediction. But actually it's a command- for Jeremiah was told "Neither go to lament nor bemoan them" (Jer. 16:5). But he did lament them- and God didn't ignore that, but rather inspired the record of the book of Jeremiah's Lamentations! Likewise God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people, but when Jeremiah insisted on doing so, God did in fact hear him. So we must be careful to discern what is prediction and what is command or intention. And even then we have to recognize that God's purpose is to some extent open-ended- if men and women wish to walk with Him but don't strictly follow His preferred intentions, He may still walk and work with them in the extension of His purpose.

*Jeremiah 16:7 neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men*

*give them the cup of consolation to drink for their father or for their mother-* The reason for this lack of mourning and burial may simply be because the idea was that all the people would perish. There would be none left to bury or lament; all were to die. But in reality that didn't happen (see on Jer. 10:18), and there are various degrees of destruction spoken about in the various prophecies.

'Breaking bread' or 'eating bread' is simply an idiom for sharing in a meal (Is. 58:7; Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4; Ez. 17:7; 24:17; Hos. 9:4; Dt. 26:14; Job 42:11). 'Bread' is used for any food, just as 'salt' is used in the same way in Arabic. The way the Lord broke His bread with sinners, with anyone, is therefore evidence enough that the 'breaking of bread' is inclusive and not exclusive. LXX "and there shall be no bread broken in mourning for them for consolation over the dead: they shall not give one to drink a cup for consolation over his father or his mother". This refers to how at the funeral, food and gifts were given to a child who lost parents. But there would be none to do so. The "breaking of bread" meeting is therefore set up as a kind of funeral celebration, but also a "cup of consolation".

*Jeremiah 16:8 You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and to drink-* Because the day was to come when they would all be dead, because of their sins, Jeremiah was not to feast with them before judgment came. The marriages and family events which they were celebrating were to come to a tragic end in the mass destruction of family life by the invaders which has just been predicted. Jeremiah, like us, was to live life now in light of how things were going to ultimately be.

*Jeremiah 16:9 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride-* This specifically states that it would happen in their days and before their eyes. The image is of a wedding being interrupted by the invaders. This suggests a sudden, unexpected invasion, rather than what happened—a lengthy siege, famine, desperate poverty, all leading towards an inevitable end when Zedekiah fled the city and the Babylonians entered Jerusalem. The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

*Jeremiah 16:10 It shall happen, when you shall show this people all these words and they shall tell you, Why has Yahweh pronounced all this great evil against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against Yahweh our God?-* The "great evil" had been done by them (Jer. 44:7 s.w.), and so the "great evil" of judgment was only an extension of their own sins. And that ought to have been obvious. Repeatedly we encounter this shameless refusal to accept they had done anything wrong, and apparently genuine shock and surprise that God should speak of judging them so severely. This indicates the degree to which they were psychologically hardened in their belief that they could serve the idols as part of serving Yahweh. This is why the reason for their judgments was not simply 'Because you worship idols!', but because of their state of heart (:11,12).

*Jeremiah 16:11 Then you shall tell them, Because your fathers have forsaken Me, says Yahweh, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken Me, and have not kept My law-* This is not to say that they were going to be punished because of the sins of their fathers. I noted on :10 how shameless they were in their idolatry, and how they were genuinely unaware of wrongdoing. But this was because they had become so hardened in sin, as people are today, that they consider that their wrongdoing is in fact righteousness. The reason why that generation was punished was because of this hardened, evil state of heart (:12); not simply because they worshipped idols. Their fathers had done that and had not received the judgment for it which they were going to.

*Jeremiah 16:12 And you have done evil more than your fathers; for behold, you walk each one after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so that you don't listen to Me-* See on :10,11. The choice was between walking after

God's word (:11), or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

*Jeremiah 16:13 Therefore will I cast you forth out of this land into the land that you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, where I will not show you favour; and there you shall serve other gods day and night- LXX "and ye shall serve their other gods, who shall have no mercy upon you". Yahweh alone has grace / mercy; this is what distinguishes Him from all forms of idolatry.*

The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jer. 16 goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (Jer. 16:17). But actually He did do just that- He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan- He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (Jer. 16:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would "cause them to know mine hand... and they shall now that my name is The Lord" (Jer. 16:21). This double recompensing of Judah's sin happened in the exile in Babylon (Is. 40:2), and therefore the joyful news was proclaimed to Zion in Is. 40 that now the Messianic Kingdom could begin. But there wasn't much interest nor response to the call to return to Judah in order to share in it. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

*Jeremiah 16:14 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be said, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt-* The form of swearing in covenant relationship was to be changed. The same verses occur in Jer. 23:7,8 in the context of Judah being offered a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant was to be made when the exiles left Babylon and the various nations within her empire where they had been scattered. But this didn't work out; because Judah refused it.

*Jeremiah 16:15 But, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries where He had driven them. I will bring them again into their land that I gave to their fathers-* See on :14. The new covenant was to be made once they left Babylon and the subject nations, just as the old covenant was made once they had left Egypt. There was intended to be some even more dramatic and powerful source of exodus in leaving Babylon than there had been in leaving Egypt. But in reality. nothing like the parting of the Red Sea or the plagues upon Egypt happened. The decree of Cyrus was clearly overruled by God, but other prophecies make it clear that the exodus of the exile was to be associated with the fall of Babylon. Indeed they were to flee Babylon so that they didn't share in her fall. And it was this dramatic action which was to convert the remnants of the Babylonian empire to Israel's God. But this didn't happen; instead this prophetic theme has been reapplied and rescheduled to the events of the last days.

*Jeremiah 16:16 Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says Yahweh, and they shall fish them up; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the clefts of the rocks-* This suggests a total regathering of all who were in captivity. This didn't happen because the exiles preferred the soft life in Persia. The effort made wasn't responded to. Indeed Jeremiah later laments that the people were "hunted" after Jerusalem fell (s.w. Lam. 3:52; 4:18). He ought to have realized that the exiles were to be hunted back to the restored kingdom- if they responded. But in his depression, he focused only upon the negative, the glass half empty rather than half full.

And perhaps the prophecy therefore was rescheduled and reapplied to the fishing of individuals to comprise a new Israel. It was whilst Simon and Andrew were in the very act of casting their net into the sea, snap shotted in a freeze-frame of still life, silhouetted against the sea and hills of Galilee, that the Lord calls them to go preaching (Mk. 1:17). The Lord surely intended them to [at least later] figure out His allusion to Jer. 16:14-16, which prophesied that fishermen would be sent out to catch Israel and bring them home to the Father. And He called them to do that, right in the very midst of everyday life. His preachers were like harvesters working in the very last hour to bring in the harvest- in fact, the harvest was spoiling because it's not being fully gathered. No delay for anything was possible in the light of the knife-edge urgency of sharing Christ with others.

*Jeremiah 16:17 For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, neither is their iniquity concealed from My eyes-* Their sin and breaking of the covenant meant that God would hide His face from them (Dt. 31:17; 32:20; Mic. 3:4). But the paradox is that God did *not* hide His face from their sins, His eyes were upon their ways. He didn't turn off His sensitivity to behaviour which so sorely hurt Him at His heart; because He desperately wishes to retain relationship for as long as possible, no matter how painful. The iniquity of Israel was not concealed from God's eyes because He Himself chose not to conceal His face from it.

*Jeremiah 16:18 First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double, because they have polluted My land with the carcasses of their detestable things, and have filled My inheritance with their abominations-* The land was literally filled with idols; the sacrifices to them are described as carcasses, which God saw as polluting the land. And so God desired to punish them "double", and so did Jeremiah, because he had the mind and feelings of God (Jer. 16:18; 17:18). But Ezra 9:13 states that God punished them less than their iniquities deserved- and not double punishment. So again we have God, through Jeremiah, speaking in the fire of His anger; but this didn't actually work out like this. The pole of His pity and grace is finally far stronger than that of His anger and judgment.

*Jeremiah 16:19 Yahweh, my strength, my stronghold and my refuge in the day of affliction, to You shall the nations come from the ends of the land and shall say, Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, vanity and things in which there is no profit-* This is Jeremiah's interjection. He is confident that he shall be preserved in the siege which was ahead. God would be his refuge; although his confident faith at this point was sorely tested when he was thrown into the dungeon to die. Jeremiah caught God's vision, of the repentant nations crossing the borders of Palestine confessing that the idols were lies and vanity. This was the Divine intention- that when Israel and Judah returned from captivity, they would come back to the land along with the repentant peoples of the nations to whom they had been scattered. But instead, they learnt the ways of the nations and worshipped their gods, as Ezekiel often laments.

*Jeremiah 16:20 Shall a man make to himself gods, which yet are no gods?-* This is apparently part of the fantasy of Jeremiah and Yahweh concerning the repentance of the surrounding nations and their turning to Yahweh having thrown away their idols. The hope was that they would confess that what a man makes with his own hands cannot therefore be God. For God by *His* hands has created man. It is the worship of works, of what we have devised by our own device... which is our modern idolatry. Hence GNB "Can people make their own gods? No, if they did, those would not really be gods".

*Jeremiah 16:21 Therefore behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is Yahweh-* LXX "I will at this time manifest my hand to them, and will make known to them my power; and they shall know that my name is the Lord". "This once" could suggest that God would do this once and for all, as if the intention was to begin the restored Kingdom there and then. The refusal of the exiles to repent precluded so much potential happening. And likewise the Gentiles continued in their idolatry. If they had repented as envisioned in :19,20, "therefore... I will cause them to know... My name". Their repentance

would have been followed by a special revelation of Yahweh to them. Having quit what was wrong, His Spirit would have revealed to them what was right. The Name of God is not so much Yahweh or Jehovah, but effectively refers to God's "hand and might", His actions and characteristics in history.

## Jeremiah Chapter 17

*Jeremiah 17:1 The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars-* The sin of Judah was written- both on their hearts and in God's record (Jer. 17:1); their iniquity was "marked before me" (Jer. 2:22). Note how their sin was written both before God and on their hearts. The state of our hearts is actually God's record of us; "the spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord" through which He searches us (Prov. 20:27).

*Jeremiah 17:2 While their children remember their altars and their Asherim by the green trees on the high hills-* The idea is as GNB "Your people worship at the altars and the symbols that have been set up for the goddess Asherah by every green tree and on the hilltops". The number of worship places for the idols was amazingly high; whereas Yahweh worship had only one altar, in the Jerusalem temple. This marked absence of religious paraphernalia in Yahweh worship was to inculcate faith. There was visual symbolism in the tabernacle ritual and temple; but this was to be meditated upon in everyday life, rather than actually physically encountered. God wanted the hearts and minds of His people, far more than acts of external obedience.

*Jeremiah 17:3 My mountain in the field, I will give your substance and all your treasures for a spoil, and your high places, because of sin, throughout all your borders-* Their idols may have been particularly in their borders, for it was from these that they went to the nations surrounding them, seeking relationship and covenants which are portrayed in the prophets as similar to prostitution. The mention of "treasures" could refer to the temple treasures, "my mountain". But it could be that until the drought, Judah had become prosperous under the reforms of Josiah. Yet their wealth is presented as parallel with their sins, which were to be punished by the loss of wealth.

*Jeremiah 17:4 You, even of yourself, shall discontinue from your inheritance that I gave you; and I will cause you to serve your enemies in the land which you don't know: for you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever-* It could be argued that death and remaining dead is in a sense suffering a punishment which has eternal consequences; it is the anger of God forever. But that seems rather forced. I would compare the statement that God's anger here burns for ever with the statements to the effect that God does not keep His anger for ever (Ps. 103:9; Jer. 3:12; Mic. 7:18). Surely this is how God felt at this time; that He would never get over what they had done, and His anger would continue for ever. This is the emotional God with whom we have to do. Likewise the threat to be discontinued from the inheritance was revised; in that Judah will finally eternally inherit the land. "Discontinue" is however the word used for the land having "rest" in the Sabbath year (Ez. 23:11), and the exile was so that the land might "rest" for all the Sabbath years she had not been rested for (Lev. 26:34,43).

*Jeremiah 17:5 Thus says Yahweh: Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from Yahweh-* It could be that the "man" in view is Egypt, upon whom Judah was trusting for deliverance from Babylon- rather than Yahweh. The same words are used in Jer. 5:23 of how the people's heart had departed from Yahweh. Always in the Old Testament it is the state of the heart which is so significant to God; and this continues in the New Testament with the huge focus upon the spirit. The chapter goes on to suddenly condemn the man who seeks to get wealth wrongfully (:11); this would be the man who made flesh- his own flesh- his strength, and filled his mind with ways of doing so.

*Jeremiah 17:6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited-* The people who trust the flesh or the world for "good" rather than Yahweh will "not see when good comes". The true good that comes only from Yahweh will not be perceived if we are focused all the time upon the "good" we think we can get from trusting in the flesh. We will not perceive the beauty of a sunrise because we are so caught up in hoping that news of a lottery win is about to come through. Such people stay in the land of condemnation ["a salt land"] by their own choice. And so many of the exiles remain in Babylon, failing to perceive the "good" which was being brought about by the "good hand of God" at the restoration (s.w. Ezra 7:9; 8:18 etc.). The very phrase "good comes" is used of the good things God would do at the restoration from Babylon (Jer. 32:42).

*Jeremiah 17:7 Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is-* So often Yahweh is portrayed as the only "confidence" or trust of His people. Judah's confidence in nations like Egypt was therefore a betrayal of their relationship with Yahweh. This rejection of trust / hope in foreign alliances is behind this comment that the man who hoped / had confidence in Yahweh alone would be blessed. The immediate context referred to having Egypt and other nations as their hope / confidence (Ez. 29:16 s.w.).

*Jeremiah 17:8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, who spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat comes, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit-* "Drought" is s.w. only in Jer. 14:1. The drought was brought as judgment upon Judah to bring about their repentance; but those who truly trusted in Yahweh (:7) would be unaffected by it in real terms. The "heat" of judgment would not ultimately affect the righteous.

*Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it?-* This has commonly been read as a generic statement about the heart of every man by nature. However, we must remember that whatever we posit about human nature, we posit about the Lord Jesus; who despite having our nature, achieved a state of being holy, perfect and undefiled, and in whose spirit or heart was no guile. But the context is of Jeremiah continually emphasizing Judah's state of heart as being critically important. See on :5. It was Judah's heart which was so corrupt; :10 suggests that God could search their hearts and potentially find good things there, but in this case He found only corruption. "Exceedingly corrupt" is the wound used about the "incurable wound" of Judah (Jer. 15:18), which by grace would be healed. It describes a state of mind gotten into, and not how things are by nature within every human being [including the Lord Jesus]. The LXX gives: "The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is the man, and who can know him?". This would explain the parallel in :10 between the man, the mind, the heart and the doings. A man is his mind.

*Jeremiah 17:10 I, Yahweh, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his works, according to the fruit of his doings-* The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

In likely allusion to the descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that we should "search and try our hearts" (Lam. 3:40)- we should seek to know ourselves as God does. David's invitations to God to search and try him (Ps. 17:3; 26:2; 139:23) imply he has done so himself (cp. Ps. 77:6). God now searches and tries the hearts, and will [at judgment day] give every man as his work shall be (Jer. 17:10 cp. Rev. 22:12). The spirit of man is [i.e. is intended to be] the candle which God also uses for His examination of men (Prov. 20:27); there is thus a link intended between our self-examination and the way God looks at us. His judgment must be ours. As sin is condemned by Him, so we should examine ourselves to the point of self-condemnation.

*Jeremiah 17:11 As the partridge that sits on eggs which she has not laid, so is he who gets riches, and not by right; in the midst of his days they shall leave him, and at his end he shall be a fool-* This warning against materialism and dishonesty in order to gain more wealth continue the warning begun in :5 about not trusting in flesh, even our own flesh. All the idolatry and poor behaviour in Judah was in fact rooted in this desire for quick blessing and wealth. The materialist "at his end [rejection at the judgment] shall be a fool" (Jer. 17:11). The utter *folly* of the rejected is a major theme (Prov. 14:8,18; Ps. 5:5; 49:13; Mt. 7:26; 25:8). Their folly will be manifest to all- not least themselves (2 Tim. 3:9). Parables like that of the rich *fool*, the *foolish* virgins... they will all be crystal clear to them. *Then* the Kingdom of Heaven will be likened to wise and foolish virgins (Mt. 25:1), after the judgment experience.

*Jeremiah 17:12 A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary-* GNB "Our Temple is like a glorious throne, standing on a high mountain from the beginning". This interjection from Jeremiah is out of step with Yahweh's position about the temple. He has made clear in Jer. 7 that it will be destroyed and His sanctuary and glory is in Heaven, not in the temple. Hence Jeremiah's bitter disappointment in Lamentations when the temple is destroyed. But at least we can say that Jeremiah's thought about God's glory and throne was in order to lift himself far above the terrible lowness of his immediate theme- men who trust in their own strength to get a little bit more glory and wealth than the man next to them.

*Jeremiah 17:13 Yahweh, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be disappointed. Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Yahweh, the spring of living waters-* The next verse and the first half of this verse are clearly Jeremiah talking. But the second half of :13 is Yahweh's response; and it is repeating what Jeremiah has just said in different words and with more detail. We marvel at the dialogue and intimacy possible between God and man. The people Jeremiah had in mind may be his persecutors, for he uses the same word "disappointed" ["ashamed"] about them in :18. Being "written in the earth" may contrast with being written in heaven (Heb. 12:23). But the idea may be that because they forsook the living waters by rejecting Jeremiah's prophetic word, they would remain written in the dust. The Lord would then be alluding to this when He wrote in the dust when rescuing the woman taken in adultery (Jn. 9). Perhaps He wrote the names of the accusers in the dust, or their names and their own sins. Jeremiah still speaks of Yahweh as "the hope of Israel", as it there were still (in his opinion) true Israel who hoped in their God.

*Jeremiah 17:14 Heal me, O Yahweh, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise-* Jeremiah was perhaps physically ill; but he expresses his affliction in terms of Israel's being smitten with judgment and then their salvation. Repeatedly, the wound of Judah is described as incurable (Jer. 15:18; 30:12,15; Mic. 1:9). Only by God's amazing and paradoxical grace could this be cured. And he had the faith and vision to believe it was possible. He saw himself as representative of the people, even though God had told him that he could not "stand before Me" for Israel in the way other intercessors had. For Israel were just too evil and rebellious against Him. "You are my praise" could mean that Jeremiah solely praised Yahweh, unlike the other Jews who praised various gods along with Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 17:15 Behold, they tell me, Where is the word of Yahweh? let it come now-* As noted on :13, the "they" here refers to Jeremiah's persecutors who had departed from Yahweh and would be ashamed. Despite the deteriorating situation with regards to Babylon's strengthening, Egypt's weakening and the terrible drought, they mocked Jeremiah's words of judgment. Even though there was every evidence that they were about to come true.

*Jeremiah 17:16 As for me, I have not hurried from being a shepherd after you-* LXX "But I have not been weary of following thee"; the continual background noise had not made him give up. And that is a thought to inspire us for all time. Or the idea may be that he had continued to try to shepherd and pastor those who so mocked him and God's word which was in his mouth.

*Neither have I desired the woeful day; you know: that which came out of my lips was before Your face-* GNB: "LORD, I never urged you to bring disaster on them; I did not wish a time of trouble for them". But the reality was that Jeremiah had done so; indeed he calls for such disaster upon them in :18 "Bring disgrace on those who persecute me, but spare me, LORD. Fill them with terror, but do not terrify me. Bring disaster on them and break them to pieces". He seems to have never quite put this matter straight in his own mind, for in Lamentations, Jeremiah likewise laments the Lord's actions in judging- when it was Jeremiah who had stated that these things should happen.

*Jeremiah 17:17 Don't be a terror to me: You are my refuge in the day of evil-* Is. 28:15,17 had used this word "refuge" to describe the refuge of lies in which the believers in false prophets and idols trusted. Jeremiah could sense the large scale of destruction to come, but often expresses his faith that somehow he will be saved.

*Jeremiah 17:18 Let them be disappointed who persecute me, but let not me be disappointed; let them be dismayed, but don't let me be dismayed-* Jeremiah remembered the command not to be dismayed in Jer. 1:17 and quotes it back to himself in Jer. 17:18. This is how we should act- quoting scripture to ourselves as encouragement. "Dismay" was a punishment from God upon them but as with all Divine judgments, this was just an extension of what the people had done to themselves. For they had dismayed themselves (Jer. 10:2).

*Bring on them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction-* God desired to punish them "double", and so did Jeremiah, because he had the mind and feelings of God (Jer. 16:18; 17:18). But Ezra 9:13 states that God punished them less than their iniquities deserved- and not double punishment. So again we have God, through Jeremiah, speaking in the fire of His anger; but this didn't actually work out like this. The pole of His pity and grace is finally far stronger than that of His anger and judgment.

*Jeremiah 17:19 Thus said Yahweh to me: Go, and stand in the gate of the children of the people through which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem-* He was to firstly announce in "the People's gate", what is now the Jaffa Gate, and then subsequently at every gate of Jerusalem. Any attempt to directly engage the leadership of a nation at war by implicitly criticizing them... is doomed to many problematic reactions. And so it was for Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 17:20 And tell them, Hear the word of Yahweh, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates-* The leadership ["kings" plural] and common people are paralleled. A leadership do what the masses want, or what they perceive they want. And the masses pressurize the leadership, however subconsciously. This is why the entire society was addressed and was culpable to judgment.

*Jeremiah 17:21 Thus says Yahweh, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem-* The emphasis upon the Sabbath is appropriate because the land is depicted as having missed out on 70 Sabbaths of rest during the period of 490 years from the time of Saul to the captivity. Therefore the land had to rest for 70 years. The Sabbath was the sign of covenant between God and Israel. To not keep it meant to despise the covenant.

*Jeremiah 17:22 Neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do any work: but make the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers-* Carrying burdens out of their private homes is paralleled with carrying them out of the gates or doors of Jerusalem (:21). Their private behaviour in their own homes was to be repeated on the scale of the whole city.

*Jeremiah 17:23 But they didn't listen neither turn their ear-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*But made their neck stiff that they might not hear and might not receive instruction-* The instruction given and refused was the previous incursions of Judah's enemies and the drought God had brought upon them (Jer. 2:30; Zeph. 3:7).

*Jeremiah 17:24 It shall happen, if you diligently listen to Me, says Yahweh, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but to make the Sabbath day holy, to do no work therein-* I noted on :22 the difference between carrying burdens out of the city, and out of their own homes. It seems that if on the level of the city it was obeyed, even if some individuals refused, then God would have restored the Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 17:25 Then shall there enter in by the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever-* If they had kept the Sabbath etc. as required, *then* the temple would have been a joyous center of worship. The language is clearly to be connected with other descriptions of the Messianic Kingdom. And this indicates that Ez. 40-48 is likewise a conditional prophecy. If they didn't carry anything out of the gates, then into the gates would come the Messianic rulers. Not carrying things out meant not trusting in their own works. If they accepted God's work rather than their own, and were obedient to the Sabbath as the sign of the covenant... then it seems that a form of the Messianic, restored Kingdom could have then begun permanently. To be obedient to the Sabbath regulations was not a big issue; and so much, even "forever", could have been achieved. They were that close, but their refusal to respond to such simple requirements indicated so much about them.

*Jeremiah 17:26 They shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places around Jerusalem, and from the land*

*of Benjamin, and from the lowland, and from the hill country, and from the South, bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of Yahweh-* This is the scene of Ez. 40-48. If Judah had been obedient, then they would have built and sacrificed in the temple there described. But they didn't.

*Jeremiah 17:27 But if you will not listen to Me to make the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day-* The offer of an eternally established city was predicated upon simply obeying this painless law about the Sabbath (:25). Their refusal to do it would therefore speak volumes- it would be tantamount to saying that they didn't want the things of God's Kingdom. Hence the severe judgment.

*Then will I kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched-* The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

The Bible is written from a Jewish perspective; the Gentile reader is 'expected' to understand that Gehenna and the concept of "eternal fire" are Jewish idioms for total destruction (Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). Although see on :4. Again, the point has to be made that much misunderstanding has arisen in 'Christian' circles on the issue of hell through failing to appreciate that God is writing in Jewish terms. The New Testament is literally packed with phrases and other language which depend on an appreciation of Old Testament theology to make sense of (e.g. Christ calling himself "the bread of life"). Nowhere, however, are we explicitly told that we must understand the New Testament's language by reference to the Old. We need to keep all these points in mind when considering the language of demons.

## Jeremiah Chapter 18

*Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* It has been truly commented about this chapter: "Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect the potter would take the clay and make it into something else. God says that this is the principle behind His actions. If He says He is going to build up a nation but the nation disobeys Him the prophecy will not be fulfilled. Equally, if He says He is going to destroy a nation and the nation repents, He will not carry out His intention". Hence if Israel turned from their way, "I may repent me of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them" (Jer. 26:3). Earlier Israel had known God's breach of promise, the altering of His purpose, in that those who were to enter Canaan actually didn't (Num. 14:34).

*Jeremiah 18:2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words-* The revelation of God's truth often requires an initial act of obedience, in this case, going to the potter's house. "P Potter" is the same word first used in Gen. 2:7 about God forming Adam from the dust. Clearly God is the potter or former, both of individuals and nations. The word is repeatedly used in later Isaiah of how God formed Israel, and would form them again as a new creation upon their return from exile in Babylon (Is. 44:24; 45:9; 64:8 etc.). Jeremiah had been reminded at the start of his ministry that he personally had been formed by God (Jer. 1:5). It is also used of how God "frames" or literally 'potters' evil or good in the life of His collective people (:11). The 'going down' could suggest there was a potter who worked in the valley near the temple; Zech. 11:13 suggests there was a potter who worked there or even within the temple. And the potter's field was effectively purchased with the blood of Christ, for Judas spent that blood money on buying the potter's field, this one which Jeremiah visited. See on Jer. 19:2.

*Jeremiah 18:3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he was making a work on the wheels-* To 'make a work' is literally 'to work a work' and is the language of creation (Gen. 2:2,3). On :2 I noted the word for "potter" is that used in the Genesis creation (Gen. 2:7 etc.). So there was the hint here at a new creation. The only other time we find the Hebrew word translated "wheels" is in Ez. 1:16 of the birthing stools upon which women gave birth- another hint at new creation.

'Working the work' is a phrase very often used about the restoration of Jerusalem (Neh. 4:16,17,21; 6:3,9,16; 11:12; 13:10; Hag. 1:14 etc.). The Kingdom could have been restored and a new creation come about from the exiles. But this too was not to happen. The clay misbehaved in the hands of the Divine potter. In the immediate context here, the term has just been used of how Judah 'worked work' on the Sabbath (Jer. 17:22,24), instead of allowing God to work. Not working their own work, keeping the Sabbath, was a sign of covenant relationship with God. God wanted to use people who could not 'work work' (Ez. 15:3,5). To trust in their own works and not allow His working was therefore effectively a breaking of covenant relationship.

*Jeremiah 18:4 When the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made of it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it-* "Marred" has a moral dimension to it, translated "corrupt" in Gen. 6:11-13, where the corrupt *eretz* had to be destroyed. The Jews were "corrupted" (Jer. 6:28 s.w. "marred"). It is the word used about how the linen girdle of Jeremiah was "marred" in figurative captivity in Babylon (Jer. 13:7,9), and yet that marred girdle was still going to be used. And we have that same message here; Judah was to be destroyed / marred because they had marred themselves, but then a new nation was to be created. What "seemed good to the potter" is again a creation allusion; for God saw what He had made and it seemed very good to Him.

*Jeremiah 18:5 Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying-* This interpretation may have come immediately as Jeremiah watched the potter, or somewhat later after he had had time to work it out for himself; in which case this subsequent revelation was only confirming him in his own conclusions.

*Jeremiah 18:6 House of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel-* God has prepared us exactly to respond to His hand. We were born at a certain point in time, formed / pottered by Him with our prehistory, gene pool history etc., so that we can respond. Any lack of response to His hand is therefore highly culpable. God could work a new vessel from the clay of Judah, as He wanted to do in the time of Moses. By grace He didn't totally destroy them, didn't grab a new piece of clay, but

rather tried to rework the existing clay. Even though in Jer. 15:6 God had said that His hand would now destroy Israel. But in fact He attempted to rework them.

*Jeremiah 18:7 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom-* God had earlier "in an instant" (s.w.) stated that He would immediately destroy Israel (Ex. 33:5; Num. 16:21,45), but this didn't happen because of Moses' intercession. Ezra perceived the connection, using this word to speak of how "for a little moment" (s.w.) the exiles had a chance to change the verdict. God speaks, but there is a gap between the statement and the fulfillment. We all live within that gap, as Judah were- and there is therefore an intensity to the need for repentance to change the otherwise certain outcome.

*To pluck up and to break down and to destroy it-* The 'plucking up' is the word used of how Judah would be plucked up out of their land for their disobedience to the prophetic word (Dt. 29:28; 2 Chron. 7:20). And as the Gentiles plucked up / out Israel from their land, so those nations would be plucked up (Jer. 12:14,15,17). Likewise the building and planting specifically refers to the restoration of Israel after their plucking up (Jer. 24:6; 31:28,40; 42:10). It was God through His word who would do these things; but that possibility worked through the preacher and proclaimer of that word. Therefore in Jer. 1:10, Jeremiah is presented as the one who would do these things. This is the enormous power delegated to all to this day who preach His word; we really can save people, plant them in the Kingdom by sowing the seed of the Kingdom; and those who refuse will be plucked up.

*Jeremiah 18:8 If that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them-* Jeremiah's message as the Babylonian armies approached Jerusalem had stressed that if the Jews repented, then God would repent of the evil He was planning to bring upon them (Jer. 18:8,10; 26:3,13). The Jews did not repent, and so Jerusalem was taken and Zedekiah deported. Even at this thirteenth hour, God said to the Jewish forces that remained at large outside Jerusalem and who were about to flee to Egypt: "If ye will still abide in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down. . . for I repent Me of the evil that I have done unto you"" (Jer. 42:10). What a God we have! Although Israel had not repented, the Angel repented to the extent of changing His pre-requisite for repenting of bringing more evil on them. And so God changed this from returning wholeheartedly to the Law, to merely remaining in the land of Israel rather than fleeing to Egypt. What of us? Jer. 31:18,19 tops all for such encouragement: "Turn thou Me (said Ephraim), and I shall be turned. . . I (God in the Angel) was turned, I repented"- and therefore God repented too! God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

Due to Moses' prayer, "the Lord repented of the evil which he had said he would do unto his people" (Ex. 32:14 RV). Yet these are the very words of Jer. 18:8- if a *nation* repents, then God will repent. But in this case, God accepted the singular prayer of Moses.

*Jeremiah 18:9 At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom, to build and to plant it-* This was the case with the people of Judah. God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10).

*Jeremiah 18:10 If they do that which is evil in My sight, that they not obey My voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I said I would benefit them-* This is exactly what happened in Jer. 42:10. The remnant left in the land could have been built and planted, into a new restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But they fled into Egypt.

*Jeremiah 18:11 Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now each one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings-* "Frame" is the word translated "potter" in :2. The call to repentance was intensely individual, to "each one". "Devise a device" is the very phrase used of how Judah's response to this was to "devise a device", to make a plot, to kill Jeremiah and stop his words, as they thought, from coming true (:18). This was perversity in the extreme. They thought they could match God's plot with their own. No wonder they could not be further worked with.

*Jeremiah 18:12 But they say, It is in vain; for we will walk after our own devices, and we will do everyone after the stubbornness of his evil heart-* They preferred their thoughts or devices to God's (:11). Whether or not they said these words, this was how God read their hearts, as saying these words. The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

*Jeremiah 18:13 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Ask now among the nations, who has heard such things; the virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing-* No god of the nations made such huge effort with their people. It was all supposedly a simplistic matter of yes / no obedience, and receiving blessings or cursings. Yahweh was far more complex in His workings, and always seeking to save and bless His people despite their disobedience. But they refused even that. "The virgin of Israel" leads us to expect that the "very horrible thing" she did was an act of immorality, sexual unfaithfulness to their God. And that is indeed how the term is always used elsewhere (Jer. 5:30,31; 18:13; 23:14; Hos. 6:10). By forming alliances with other nations and serving their gods, they had been unfaithful to the God who wanted to marry them; for that is the implication of a virgin being unfaithful.

*Jeremiah 18:14 Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field? Shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?-* It ought to have been natural for Israel to respond to such amazing grace and love; but their refusal of it was as unnatural as gushing melt water on a slope suddenly drying up. Likewise any refusal of God's love is a conscious fighting against Him, clay resisting His forming hand.

*Jeremiah 18:15 For My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to false gods-* The allusion is to Dt. 32:18, where Israel "forgot God who formed you", and we have shown on :2 that a "potter" is literally a 'former'. But Israel claimed to worship Yahweh; yet they forgot or were oblivious to the real implications of Him. We too can go through a semblance of worship whilst having effectively forgotten our God.

*And they have been made to stumble in their ways, in the ancient paths, to walk in byways, in a way not built up-* At the restoration, these rocky paths were to be made smooth. Is. 57:14 teaches that a level way must be made amongst the Jewish people, i.e. the stumbling blocks and 'valleys' must be removed from their path. "Cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people" is therefore a command to God's people to undo the generations of false shepherding which Israel have experienced: "They have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up" (Jer. 18:15 s.w. "cast...up" in Is. 57:14). Once we have prepared the way in this sense, then the highway is in place over which the Lord Jesus will return. This is how vital our work is for the Jewish people.

*Jeremiah 18:16 To make their land an astonishment and a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and shake his head-* But the land was not perpetually mocked. As explained on Jer. 10:18, many remained in the land and it was not left totally desolate. In wrath God remembered mercy, and there is also the factor of intercession and repentance of a minority to be taken into account.

*Jeremiah 18:17 I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity-* This is what was done to the Egyptians at the Red Sea, driven back by an east wind. God showed them His back, so that they were in darkness and could not reach the Israelites. But out of that destruction there was to arise a new people, redeemed from Babylon after the pattern of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. That was the Divine hope and program, although it never really came true at that time as it could have done.

At the time when Moses doubts whether he really has found grace, the God who speaks to Moses face to face then

turns and shows Moses only His back parts (Ex. 33:11,20,22). This is alluded to in Jer. 18:17 and there interpreted as being a sign of God's anger- to turn away His face and show His back parts. God was so angry with Moses' disbelief in His grace. And that was the problem with Judah at this time.

*Jeremiah 18:18 Then they said, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words-* "Devise a device" is the very phrase used in :11 of God's device to destroy Israel. But Judah's response to this was to "devise a device", to make a plot, to kill Jeremiah and stop his words, as they thought, from coming true. They satisfied themselves that Jeremiah was a false prophet, and the false prophets were the true prophets. They considered Jeremiah a renegade priest; the priests' duty was to teach God's word, and the rest of the priests taught the words of the false prophets in the name of Yahweh. Ez. 7:26 alludes to these words, saying that the law would perish from these priests.

*Jeremiah 18:19 Give heed to me, Yahweh, and listen to the voice of those who contend with me-* Jeremiah was aware of what they were saying, perhaps because God revealed it to him in :18. He asks for his words to be heard, and also the words of his enemies. This is an example of where our situation is heard by God as a prayer. The words of our enemies are heard as if they are words addressed to God, requiring Him to respond to them. We therefore shouldn't be so steamed up about them.

*Jeremiah 18:20 Shall evil be recompensed for good? For they have dug a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before You to speak good for them, to turn away Your wrath from them-* Seeing the world through the eyes of both God and man- Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of God" (Jer. 6:11), and yet he stood before God "to turn away thy wrath from them" (Jer. 18:20). Hence the huge psychological tension within the prophets. 'Standing before the Lord' refers to prayer- Ps. 106:23; Ezra 9:15; Jer. 15:1; 18:20. To live a life standing before the Lord is to live a life of prayer. Hence David and Paul say that prayer can be continual- in that life becomes a lived out prayer, with the practice of living in the presence of God. And straight away we ask ourselves, in lives just as busy as those of David and Paul, whether our self-talk, our minute by minute inner consciousness, is "before the Lord"... or merely the sheer and utter vapidness of the modern mind. Jeremiah's intercession for those who hated him was heard by God, and He turned away His wrath from them. And yet they sought to kill Jeremiah. This was typical of the work and experience of the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 18:21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows; and let their men be slain of death, and their young men struck of the sword in battle-* When Jeremiah's wishes here came true, he spends the book of Lamentations lamenting it, referring to these very words. We must be so careful what we pray for, especially if it is imprecation against others, lest it come true. He therefore lamented his own prayer at length.

*Jeremiah 18:22 Let a cry be heard from their houses, when You shall bring a troop suddenly on them; for they have dug a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet-* The sudden nature of Jerusalem's fall is emphasized (Jer. 4:20; 6:26; 15:8; 18:22); she was to fall as Babylon would "suddenly" fall (Jer. 51:8). Jerusalem fell predictably after a siege, there were no great surprises that she fell. It was not a sudden fall that came out of left field, unexpectedly. And yet that is the implication of the prophecies. Babylon was reveling in prosperity when the Medes unexpectedly took the city; but the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon was totally expected and inevitable. Yet the fall is spoken of as "sudden". It could be that a potential "sudden" invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was projected by God, but the intercession of the few faithful, or the repentance of a tiny remnant, changed this possible outcome of their sin. So many different possibilities of judgment are given, ranging from a quarter destruction to total destruction of people and even all animal life. This reflects the open nature of God's working with His people, setting up various potentials in order to be fully responsive to human freewill decisions.

*Jeremiah 18:23 Yet, Yahweh, You know all their counsel against me to kill me-* They falsely claimed prophetic revelation to kill Jeremiah as he was a false prophet (:18; see on Jer. 19:7).

*Don't forgive their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Your sight; but let them be overthrown before You; may You deal with them in the time of Your anger-* When Jeremiah's wishes here came true, he spends the book of

Lamentations lamenting it, referring to these very words. We must be so careful what we pray for, especially if it is imprecation against others, lest it come true. He therefore lamented his own prayer at length. Jeremiah here is the very opposite of Moses, who pleaded that the people who despised him would have their sin blotted out. And yet Jeremiah also comes over as at times far too positive about Israel, complaining that God's judgments were too harsh. He may have been bi-polar, or simply going through the mood swings that were perhaps inevitable to anyone who was representative of both God and Israel. And his internal conflict between these two poles, of judgment and grace, also reflected those within God, as brought out in Hosea, where His "repentings" are unbearable for Him (Hos. 11:8). See on Jer. 20:13.

## Jeremiah Chapter 19

*Jeremiah 19:1 Thus said Yahweh, Go and buy a potter's earthen bottle, and take some of the elders of the people and of the elders of the priests-* This meant a return visit to the potter of Jer. 18:2. The priests he took with him may well have been his own relatives, and those of Jer. 18:21-23 who were intent upon killing Jeremiah because his message about the potter hit home too hard. And now he was asked to repeat such teaching, to this same group.

*Jeremiah 19:2 and go forth to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the gate Harsith, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell you-* I suggested on Jer. 18:2 that it was in a muddy part of this valley that the potter was working and had his field. LXX has "read" for "proclaim", suggesting these words of prophecy were given to Jeremiah and he or Baruch wrote them down before he read them out. The "gate Harsith" is GNB "The potsherd gate". The gate which led to the valley of Hinnom was known by this name because potters worked there, and the fragments of their broken vessels, remnants of pottery projects that hadn't worked out, were strewn around the place. "Harsith" is literally "potsherd". All this spoke of the broken projects of so many of God's people; and their worship of idols in that valley of the potter was the cause for all the failures. No wonder this same valley where rubbish such as potsherds were thrown and burnt, known in the New Testament as Gehenna, became the Lord's symbol of choice for total destruction of those who fail to be formed by God into His chosen vessels.

*Jeremiah 19:3 and say, Hear the word of Yahweh, kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil on this place, which whoever hears, his ears shall tingle-* God is repeatedly presented as the ultimate source of "evil". There is no radical evil in the cosmos outside of His control. There is no cosmic Satan figure; all "evil" is under His control, and performed by His Angelic "armies" manifested through human armies used by them, as the Babylonians were at this time.

*Jeremiah 19:4 Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it to other gods that they didn't know, they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and have filled this place with the blood of innocents-* "Know" in its Hebraic sense refers to relationship. They worshipped gods with whom they had no relationship, even if (as explained on Jer. 14:1-5) they 'knew' and learnt how to worship them, they did not "know" them in terms of relationship. No idol of whatever form can provide the genuine, dynamic relationship which is possible between Yahweh and His people.

*Jeremiah 19:5 and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings to Baal; which I didn't command, nor spoke it, neither came it into My mind-* God describes the word which He inspires as coming into His mind- as if it occurs to Him, and then He inspires men with it. Although God is outside time, this mustn't lead us to conclude that He is somehow static and unfeeling; He reveals Himself as accommodating Himself to men to the extent that He has feelings of joy at the moment of our repentance (consider the Father rushing out to the returning son) and sorrow and anguish at the times of our apostasy (consider the Almighty "rising early and sending" the prophets). Although He is outside time, yet He limits His omniscience (as He evidently limits His omnipotence). It could even be that although He *could* see every possible future and foresee our behaviour well before our birth, He somehow ignores this possibility. This is why He is described as being disappointed at Israel's level of response to His love, shocked at their sins, surprised at their perversions (e.g. Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

*Jeremiah 19:6 therefore, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter-* LXX: "This place shall no more be called, The fall and burial-place of the son of Ennom, but, The burial-place of slaughter". The valley of Hinnom was known from before the Israelites entered Canaan (Josh. 15:8), so Ennom must have been a Canaanite who died there, perhaps 'fell' in battle there, and was buried there. Instead of commemorating the fall of the Canaanites, it would now remember the fall of the Israelites there.

*Jeremiah 19:7 I will nullify the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life: and their dead bodies will I give to be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth-* In the very place of idol worship, there was false teaching. This was because the priests and false prophets were in league (Jer. 18:18) and their specific counsel was to murder

Jeremiah (Jer. 18:23). They falsely claimed prophetic revelation to kill Jeremiah as he was a false prophet (Jer. 18:18). It was the men of Anathoth, Jeremiah's home town, his own relatives who were also priests, who sought his life (Jer. 11:21). Their punishment was to be that the Babylonians would seek their lives, and slay them. What they intended to do to Jeremiah would be done to them. But in a low moment, Jeremiah lost his faith in this (see on Jer. 20:10).

*Jeremiah 19:8 I will make this city an astonishment, and a hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues-* The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

*Jeremiah 19:9 I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters; and they shall eat each one the flesh of his friend, in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies, and those who seek their life, shall distress them-* This was more relevant to AD70 than to the Babylonian siege. This was because these prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the Romans, as they will likewise come to their ultimate term in the last days.

*Jeremiah 19:10 Then you shall break the bottle in the sight of the men who go with you-* The religious and civil leadership (:1).

*Jeremiah 19:11 and shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel-* The world will be broken to shivers, "as the vessels of a potter" (Rev. 2:26). But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (Jer. 18:4-6; 19:11). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

*That can't be made whole again-* The broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently. But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

*And they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to bury-* I have noted several times that the prophesied judgments in Jeremiah differ from each other; he has also predicted that there would be such mass destruction that there would be nobody to bury the dead, for all would be slain (Jer. 14:16). But Jer. 19:11 speaks of burying bodies in Topheth. These different scenarios didn't all come true. There were various prophetic options, according to the exact measure of Israel's repentance and Jeremiah's intercession; or perhaps, simply according to the pity which Yahweh would finally show this sinful people.

*Jeremiah 19:12 Thus will I do to this place, says Yahweh, and to its inhabitants, even making this city as Topheth-* All the once holy city would become as the burial place in Topheth. The Jews had always been careful to bury bodies outside of the city, lest it be defiled; but the whole city would become a place of dead bodies.

*Jeremiah 19:13 and the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah, which are defiled, shall be as the place of Topheth, even all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to all the army of the sky, and have poured out drink offerings to other gods-* As noted on :12, the Jews had always been careful to bury bodies outside of the city, lest it be defiled; but the houses within the city would become full of dead bodies. Those houses had been built on the back of fraud. They would be destroyed along with the temple, and the historical records of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem emphasize that the "great houses" were also destroyed. We note too the extent of their idolatry; not just in Topheth, but on the roofs of their private homes. They were like a sexually obsessed

woman; they worshipped every possible idol or god, hoping for some material benefit from it.

*Jeremiah 19:14 Then came Jeremiah from Topheth, where Yahweh had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of Yahweh's house and said to all the people- LXX "And Jeremias came from the place of the Fall".* The sin of Judah is presented as that of Adam, and the way Zedekiah flees to the east and Judah are sent out of the land to the east continues the similarities.

*Jeremiah 19:15 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it; because they have made their neck stiff, that they may not hear My words-* The significance of bringing the evil pronounced is in the fact that God speaks, but there is a gap between the statement and the fulfillment. We all live within that gap, as Judah were- and there is therefore an intensity to the need for repentance to change the otherwise certain outcome. But they had stiffened their neck. To really hear God's words requires humility, a bowing of the neck, and a willingness to change the well trodden paths of habitual reactions, a softness and flexibility which doesn't come naturally.

## Jeremiah Chapter 20

*Jeremiah 20:1 Now Pashhur the son of Immer the priest, who was chief officer in the house of Yahweh, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things-* "Pashhur" means 'liberated'. This may well have been his title; he was preaching liberty to act as they naturally wanted. God's response was to proclaim a liberty to the sword and to destruction for such people (Jer. 34:17). He was the equivalent of the New Testament false prophets who taught that we can continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). See on Jer. 21:1.

*Jeremiah 20:2 Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of Yahweh-* In this Jeremiah was a type of the Lord Jesus, indeed more than this- Jeremiah might have been a potential Messiah figure of some sort, but Judah rejected him. The way the servant is beaten and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). "Stocks" is LXX "dungeon".

*Jeremiah 20:3 It happened on the next day, that Pashhur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, Yahweh has not called your name Pashhur, but Magormissabib-* LXX "Not Pashhur, but Exile". GNB "Terror everywhere" connects with :4, "I will make you a terror...". And the same phrase is used in :10; the terror everywhere would be due to Pashhur. He appears to have been the chief false prophet and is singled out for particular mention and condemnation.

*Jeremiah 20:4 For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends-* As noted on :3, this was to be the meaning of his new name, hence he was a terror to himself.

*And they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword-* As explained on Jer. 10:18, not "all Judah" went to Babylon, in fact only a minority of them. Again we see God's pole of pity and grace overpowering the pole of judgment within His personality. But the tension and struggle between those poles were very real for Him, as they were within His representative Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 20:5 Moreover I will give all the riches of this city, and all its gains, and all the precious things of it, yes, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies; and they shall make them a prey, and take them, and carry them to Babylon-* This alludes to Isaiah's words to Hezekiah, that all his wealth and royal descendants would be taken to Babylon as punishment for his pride and refusing to act as the intended Messianic ruler of the restored kingdom was meant to. And yet here the fault for that is blamed upon Pashhur and those who believed him. We reflect how all God's actions and judgments are a careful calculation, taking multiple factors into account, and are far from being a swipe in anger at those who displease Him.

*Jeremiah 20:6 You, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity; and you shall come to Babylon, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you, and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely-* We wonder why Pashhur wasn't killed but died having seen the suffering and death of those to whom he had falsely prophesied. This was likely extra punishment for the man; to have died by the sword in Jerusalem would have been a lesser judgment. And this is how the condemnation of the wicked will work out at the last day; the grades of punishment will be in terms of seeing the result of their actions, rather than in degrees of heat or torture as classically imagined.

*Jeremiah 20:7 Yahweh, you have seduced me, and I was seduced; You are stronger than me, and I am overcome: I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocks me-* See on Ez. 14:9. Despite the unity of spirit between God and the prophets, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Jer. 20:7 is made a mess of in most translations, because the obvious translation is simply too shocking. Jeremiah complains: "O Lord, thou hast seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I am seduced; thou hast raped me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Rabbi Abraham Heschel's translation). Here is Jeremiah saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the

whole thing became too much- he felt his soul had been raped. And yet in Jer. 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by thy name, O Lord"- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight"- two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (Jer. 7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an inbreathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (Jer. 6:11). A prophet could only be incensed if God was incensed (Num. 23:8)- such was the bond between them. No wonder these men felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy. But in Jer. 20:7, Jeremiah felt he had been raped and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. See on :10.

If we stick with the translation "deceived", then we conclude that Jeremiah feared God had deceived *him* (Jer. 20:7 AV)- showing he knew such a thing was possible. Dt. 13:1-3 warns Israel not to believe prophets whose prophecies came true although they taught false doctrines, because they may have been raised up to test their obedience.

*Jeremiah 20:8 For whenever I speak, I cry out Your word-* LXX "For I will laugh with my bitter speech" sounds as if Jeremiah is sarcastically saying that he will laugh along with his mockers. His attitude seems so bitter and resentful of his being mocked that it is not altogether correct.

*I cry, Violence and destruction! But the word of Yahweh is made a reproach to me and a derision all the day-* "Reproach... and a derision" is quoting verbatim from Ps. 44:13; 79:4, which speak of how God's people became just this because of their sins. Jeremiah identifies with Israel, and yet feels that this is how he is treated by Israel. And he clearly minded it; he was very sensitive to being mocked. Yet through this experience he was enabled to identify with how Israel were to be made to their neighbours. Nothing is ever wasted in the Divine ecology.

*Jeremiah 20:9 If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name; then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I can't-* This could as well be translated as meaning that Jeremiah did decide not to make mention of Him nor speak any more. We get the impression that at this point he had had enough, he was a reluctant if not rebellious prophet. And yet because the writing of God's Word is a result of God's will rather than human desire, he was "carried along by the Holy Spirit" so that he had no choice in the matter. Peter describes this idea of the Bible writers being 'carried along' with the same Greek word used in Acts 27:17,27 about a ship being 'driven' by the wind, out of control. Mic. 2:7 comments that truly inspired prophets can't be stopped from speaking forth God's word, because God's Spirit controlling them can't be constrained. Those men were truly 'carried along'. And yet in Jeremiah's case, he was also willing, and his spirit was that of God on so many points. Perhaps therefore it was not that he was irresistibly forced to prophesy; the fire he felt within may not simply have been that of Divine inspiration forcing him, but the passion he felt for his people, which made him return to being a willing mouthpiece.

*Jeremiah 20:10 For I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side-* "Terror everywhere (GNB) / on every side" is one meaning of "Magormissabib" in :3. The terror to come upon Judah was partly because of their defamation of Jeremiah, who had spoken God's word to them.

*Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, those who watch for my fall-* LXX "Conspire ye, and let us conspire together against him". But Jeremiah has just been assured that all such plots would come to nothing (Jer. 18:18,23; 19:7). In this low moment he appears to have lost his faith in that promise, although it returns in :11. His "familiar friends" were literally those of his family, the men of Anathoth, his fellow priests (Jer. 11:21).

*Perhaps he will be persuaded, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him-* Clearly Jeremiah was being set up in some kind of trap, being persuaded to say or so things which would ensnare him. The language here of traps and faithless "familiar friends" is that of the Messianic Psalms. His heart was clearly in those Psalms, and this makes him even more a type of Christ. "Persuaded" is the same word as "seduced" in :7. He felt on one hand seduced by God, and then bitterly disappointed; and yet seduced by the false prophets too, although he resisted that. Possibly some kind of sexual seduction was offered to him.

*Jeremiah 20:11 But Yahweh is with me as an awesome mighty one-* "Awesome mighty one" is literally 'an oppressor'. Jeremiah felt at times that God had seduced him and taken him over (:7) and he apparently resented that. His language seems inappropriate, but he speaks so often in depression and states his feelings without much apparent effort at self-controlling them.

*Therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be utterly disappointed, because they have not dealt wisely-* This was exactly as promised in Jer. 18:18,23; 19:7. But in :10 Jeremiah temporarily lost his faith in this and despaired. He is so human and so imaginable.

*Even with an everlasting dishonour which shall never be forgotten-* Eternal shame is a common condemnation of the wicked. Seeing they will be long dead and gone, it is us, the accepted, who by God's grace will recall the terrible shame of the rejected throughout our eternity. Their shame will be so terrible; and hence their anger will likewise be.

*Jeremiah 20:12 But, Yahweh of Armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind-* The 'testing' of Judah was to be through melting them in the furnace of Jerusalem, caused by the fire of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 9:7; Zech. 13:9). We learn here that the essential purpose of that was to try / test / purify / reveal their heart and mind; for that was and is of utterly paramount importance to God.

*Let me see Your vengeance on them-* But when he did see this, he bitterly laments over it, in Lamentations. We must be careful what we ask for, lest we receive it. There is more information about Jeremiah's feelings about his persecutors at Jer. 20:10-12. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, and it seems Jer. 11:20 refers to the same time as Jer. 20:10-12.

*For to You have I revealed my cause-* The fact God sees and knows all means that we might as well open our lives up before Him in prayer and meditation. Jeremiah "revealed my cause" before the Lord because he knew that God "tests the heart and the mind". This may be why men like Jeremiah were somewhat 'rough' with God; whatever they felt about God, they told Him. They so knew that God knew their thoughts... there was and is no point in saying fine words to God in prayer, whilst feeling harder about Him in ones heart. "Revealed my cause" is legal language, used also in Jer. 11:20. He feels that his prayer is an approach to the throne of God, and he seeks justice and judgment from Him- vengeance on his false accusers. Prayer is indeed a foretaste of the judgment; we come boldly before the throne of grace just as we shall likewise come boldly before that throne at the last day.

*Jeremiah 20:13 Sing to Yahweh, praise Yahweh; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers-* This is typical of the almost bi-polar nature of Jeremiah; ecstatic praise after desperation and almost collapse of faith earlier in this chapter, and then in the next verse, having suicidal thoughts. Maybe he was not bi-polar but simply going through the mood swings that were perhaps inevitable to anyone who was representative of both God and Israel. And his internal conflict between these two poles, of judgment and grace, also reflected those within God, as brought out in Hosea, where His "repentings" are unbearable for Him (Hos. 11:8). See on Jer. 18:23.

*Jeremiah 20:14 Cursed is the day in which I was born: don't let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed-* Jer. 20:14-18 is quoting from the depression of Job in Job 3:3-12. Whilst Jeremiah was in a sense wrong to have these suicidal thoughts, and was denigrating his own ministry which was from God, even in those low moments he turned to Biblical precedent. He recalled there was another man who had been betrayed by his friends and misrepresented by them.

*Jeremiah 20:15 Cursed is the man who brought news to my father saying, A boy is born to you; making him very glad-* The quotation from Job 3:3-12 is not exact. We wonder whether Jeremiah had only verbally recalled from memory those words, hence the discrepancies; or whether he was quoting from an earlier version which under inspiration was edited during the exile into its current form.

*Jeremiah 20:16 Let that man be as the cities which Yahweh overthrew, and didn't relent: and let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontime-* This is alluding to Sodom and Gomorrah. It seems an awful imprecation to bring down upon the head of an innocent messenger of decades previously. Jeremiah here surely is in depression,

quoting Job's depressed words without pausing to put meaning into those words. We have noted often how he does this about his enemies, and then in Lamentations laments how his imprecations actually came true.

*Jeremiah 20:17 because God didn't kill me from the womb; and so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb always great-* This idea that the naturally aborted child remained within the mother is of course medically inaccurate, but the Bible doesn't carry inspired footnotes which point out the scientific inaccuracies of the recorded statements. We need to remember this when we encounter the language of demons being used to describe mental illness and their cure in the New Testament.

*Jeremiah 20:18 Why came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?-* GNB "to end my life in disgrace?". God had promised to preserve Jeremiah's life, so this is definitely Jeremiah in weakness. But this 'end of life' may refer to his plans to commit suicide. He was a man called to do God's work, as we all are. His despising of his life is therefore deeply wrong. But it is recorded as comfort for us as we reflect upon words written or spoken in depression. Just as Job's words quoted here were not held against Job, and at the end he is commended for having spoken rightly about God. It seems that God does cut some slack to the feelings of depressed people. And we should likewise.

## Jeremiah Chapter 21

*Jeremiah 21:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when king Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest saying-* We noted on Jer. 20:3-6 that Jerusalem's judgments were blamed upon Pashhur son of Immer. This is probably the same as this Passhur ben Malchijah. It seems too unusual that two men of the same name occur in two chapters which follow on from each other. This man had a huge role to play in the false prophecies. That Zedekiah should send this false prophet to Jeremiah to ask for God's true word, and to ask him to pray for the people... would indicate that at best Zedekiah was out of touch, and yet more realistically it seems Zedekiah went along with a plan by Pashhur to get Jeremiah to say things for which they would further condemn and punish him. "Malchijah" is literally "Yah's king". It could be that this person was both in the kingly line and also the priestly line (Jer. 20:1). He could have been the Messianic king-priest of the restored Kingdom; but he chose not to be. This would explain the extraordinary condemnation of him in Jer. 20.

*Jeremiah 21:2 Please inquire of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us: perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that He may go up from us-* This is the typical human tendency, to ask someone else to pray for us, to engage with God on our behalf. God wanted to deal directly with Israel, speaking personally to them; but they wanted Moses to go and talk with Him and then tell them. We see the same mentality in 1 Kings 13:6; Acts 8:28. It is classic religion, and is on the opposite pole of personal relationship with God which the Bible seeks to inculcate. We note that they are now recognizing that Egypt is not going to help them; Ezekiel pictures them as a prostitute now desperately going to all and any man for help against Babylon, and that included going to Yahweh. Perhaps this incident is after the battle of Carchemish when Egyptian military power was destroyed by Babylon. "All His wondrous works" is quoting Ex. 3:20 of Yahweh's deliverance of the people from the Egyptians. They were aware of Yahweh's historical salvation, and were asking for it to be repeated. But they were to be treated like Egypt, and smitten along with their animals with a great plague (:6).

*Jeremiah 21:3 Then Jeremiah said to them, You shall tell Zedekiah-* We might imagine that his response could have been that God had told him not to pray for them. But God does respond, although not with the message they expected and hoped for.

*Jeremiah 21:4 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who besiege you without the walls-* This continues the great prophetic theme that all human strength and military technology is brought down beneath God's judgment. See on :13.

*And I will gather them into the midst of this city-* The implication is that God is within the city, the shekinah glory was still present in the temple according to Ezekiel's visions. And yet instead of this meaning that they would therefore have the protection of their God, He would in fact gather the besiegers into the city, "into the midst" of it, that is to Zion, the temple itself.

*Jeremiah 21:5 I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, wrath and great indignation-* This contradicts the common understanding that a national god, or the god of a city, would always fight *for* and not against that people or city; for to do otherwise would seem so illogical, to as it were destroy himself. But the God of Israel was so different; He would Himself fight against His own people, city and nation. And this implied that He would do so to His own personal hurt and loss. His wrath was therefore not painless for Him. It was the duty of the priests to discharge their office so that there would not be the "indignation" of Yahweh against His people (Num. 1:53; 18:5 s.w.). This statement is therefore tantamount to saying that the priesthood had not done their work. Jeremiah was himself a priest; no wonder his own relatives, who were also priests, were so incensed against him. "Anger... wrath... and indignation" is a quote from the curses for breaking the covenant (Dt. 29:28).

*Jeremiah 21:6 I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and animal: they shall die of a great plague-* It seems that one prophetic scenario was that God would create "a great [specific] plague" which would destroy both people and animals within Jerusalem. As noted on :2, the people thought God would deliver them as He had Israel from Egypt; but they were to be treated like the Egyptians, to whom they had returned in their hearts and whom they

had looked to for deliverance from Babylon. And yet it seems that this particular scenario didn't happen; there is no mention of such a great plague. In wrath God remembered mercy, or chose to work through one of the other possible paths of judgment which Jeremiah has elsewhere outlined. All the time we see God's flexibility and openness to working with men.

*Jeremiah 21:7* Afterward, says Yahweh, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even such as are left in this city from the plague, from the sword and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life: and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy- I noted on :6 that this "great plague" which was to destroy most of the people and animals in the city didn't apparently happen. And likewise the remnant were not all killed by the sword nor were all the people taken to Babylon (see on Jer. 10:18). Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity (Jer. 52:11). Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did.

*Jeremiah 21:8* To this people you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death- Although they had broken the covenant (see on :5), they are now invited to see themselves as facing again the choice of accepting or rejecting it. For these are the words which God presented to Israel as they entered the land (Dt. 31:27). Even at this point there was the possibility that they could enter a reestablished land and Kingdom of God.

As Yahweh was with Moses- not just in power, but in wondrous patience and gentleness- so He will be with us too. Not only did God encourage Joshua to see himself as in Moses' shoes; He inspired Jeremiah likewise (Jer. 21:8 = Dt. 30:15,19), and Ezekiel (Ez. 2:3 = Dt. 31:27; Neh. 9:17; Num. 17:10); and He wishes us to also see Moses' God as our God. But if Moses' God is to be ours in truth in the daily round of life, we must rise up to the dedication of Moses; as he was a faithful steward, thoroughly dedicated to God's ecclesia (Heb. 3:5), so we are invited follow his example (1 Cor. 4:2; Mt. 24:45).

*Jeremiah 21:9* He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he who goes out, and passes over to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey- The prediction of death by plague in Jer. 21:6 was therefore conditional. Those prophetic words need not have come true if Israel had been obedient to this call to surrender. "Passes over" is literally "to fall down". They were to accept their condemnation, and thereby save their lives. Their lives would be to them "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

*Jeremiah 21:10* For I have set My face against this city for evil and not for good, says Yahweh: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire- A pagan god looked after his own people against their enemies. But Yahweh of Israel sent and empowered Israel's enemies against them, and gave them victory against His own people; He encamped against His very own people (Is. 29:2-4). The archenemy of Israel, Assyria, was revealed as a rod in the God of Israel's hand (Is. 10:5 etc.), and the King of Babylon was Yahweh's servant who would come against Yahweh's own people (Jer. 25:9; 27:6 etc.). The will of Israel's God was that the capital city, seen by the people as the symbol and nerve center of a god's power and control, was to be destroyed by Israel's enemies (Jer. 34:1-5; 21:3-7). In the surrounding culture of Israel, capital cities were portrayed as women, the wives of the gods. They are always presented as pure and wonderful. But the prophets represent cities like Jerusalem and

Samaria as fallen women, whores. It was all *so* counter-cultural. Yahweh's prophet even appealed for Israel to surrender when under siege (Jer. 21:8-10). Try to enter into how radical and counter-cultural all this was. The prophets were trying to share the feelings and positions of a God *so* vastly different to the imaginations and understandings of His very own people. The nervous stress of this, the psychological pressure, can't be underestimated. And we are asked to share the spirit / mind / disposition of those prophets. Not only was God on the side of Israel's enemies; yet through all that, He somehow *was* with Israel; quite simply, "God is with us", even though it is He who encamps against them too (Is. 8:9,10; 18:4). The God of Auschwitz is somehow still the God of Israel. The very torment, even torture, of understanding that was etched clearly in the prophets, and it will be in us too.

*Jeremiah 21:11 Touching the house of the king of Judah, hear the word of Yahweh-* The family of Zedekiah were guilty of injustice and abusing people (:12), and he clearly was involved in this himself. He was not simply weak minded and manipulated by his courtiers; he was himself guilty.

*Jeremiah 21:12 House of David, thus says Yahweh, Execute justice in the morning, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor-* They went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so (Ez. 45:8). And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them. This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn... The intention was that they would "bear the punishment of their iniquity... *that* the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11). The call to execute justice "in the morning" may not simply refer to how courts were typically held in the morning; it could be an urgent call to immediately reform, from tomorrow morning. They were acting as "the oppressor" to God's people, and so they too were to be oppressed by the Babylonians (Jer. 50:33 s.w.). How they treated their brethren was directly related to how they would be treated in their judgment, and this principle applies for all time.

*Lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings-* At the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, the implication was that the wrath could be quenched still (Jer. 4:4); but the time would come when it could not be. By the time of Jer. 7:20, God was saying that His wrath could no longer be quenched (as 2 Kings 22:17; 2 Chron. 34:25). And yet even after this point, God still speaks as if it could be quenched by repentance (Jer. 21:12). Even to the point of self-contradiction, God was so eager to have His wrath quenched. And this God is our God. His eagerness for human repentance should be reflected in our attitudes, both to others and to our own sins. Breaking relationship with people by casting them out of fellowship is not reflective of that.

*Jeremiah 21:13 Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley and of the rock of the plain, says Yahweh; you that say, who shall come down against us? Or who shall enter into our habitations?-* LXX "that dwellest in the valley of Sor". It could be that :13,14 speak of the judgment of Moab in similar terms to Jer. 48:8,21 and they have become added here out of place. Yet :14 can be clearly understood as referring to Jerusalem. But GNB likely has the sense right: "You, Jerusalem, are sitting high above the valleys, like a rock rising above the plain. But I will fight against you. You say that no one can attack you or break through your defense". This continues the theme that all human might and apparent advantage is as nothing before God's judgment; see on :4. These were likely the words of the false prophets, who taught [as some evangelicals do today] that Jerusalem is inviolate and will always be protected by Yahweh. But that is to argue on the level of mere religion and not spirituality. God's historical actions against Jerusalem clearly show that she is not inviolate.

*Jeremiah 21:14 I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, says Yahweh; and I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her-* Jerusalem being like a forest destroyed by a forest fire is the language of Is. 9:18. The "forest" of Jerusalem may refer to the temple, famed for its cedar paneling from the forests of Lebanon (see on Zech. 11:1). The prophetic word in Jeremiah's mouth was like fire, and it was the people who were to be "devoured" by it (Ez. 15:5; s.w. Jer. 5:14; 17:27; 21:14). The amazing grace explained in Ez. 15 was in the fact that the 'devoured by fire' vine twig would be refined in Babylon and still used by God to reestablish His Kingdom.

## Jeremiah Chapter 22

*Jeremiah 22:1 Thus said Yahweh: Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word saying-* This 'going down' could reflect the coming down of Yahweh in judgment. It was 'down' from the Temple on the eastern hill of Jerusalem to the king's house, which was on lower ground.

*Jeremiah 22:2 Hear the word of Yahweh, king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter in by these gates-* That the king still sat on David's throne was a reminder of the potential still possible; see on :4. The appeal is carefully made not just to the king and his courtiers, but also to all the people; or at least to all the people who entered the gates of the king's house. The guilt for what was to happen is continually expressed as being far more than merely with the leadership.

*Jeremiah 22:3 Thus says Yahweh: Execute justice and righteousness, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence, to the foreigner, the fatherless, nor the widow; neither shed innocent blood in this place-* Because they oppressed Gentiles, therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33; Jer. 50:33 s.w.). Their judgments were appropriate to their sins. Innocent blood was shed in the temple; it was there that the idols were worshipped and child sacrifice made. They had made the temple as a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11), and these two ideas are found in Ez. 18:10: "If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things". These were all things going on at the time of Ezekiel. The exiles needed to repent of these things. These actual things had been practiced by the ruling classes who were now in exile with Ezekiel. The same word is used to express how the Jerusalem temple had been turned by the priests into a "den of robbers" or oppressors (Jer. 7:11; 22:3). Jeremiah as a priest is addressing the leaders of the priests. One reason Judah was destroyed was because Manasseh was a 'shedder of blood' (2 Kings 21:16; 24:4). Perhaps this was being focused upon by some, complaining that God was unfairly punishing them for Manasseh's sins. But the reality was that in essence, his descendants and wider family had done the same as he had done. For they too had been involved in the shedding of the innocent blood of their own children to the idol cults (Ps. 106:38).

*Jeremiah 22:4 For if you do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people-* But the gates were to be burnt with fire, because Israel "would not". To as it were incite their repentance, God makes the offer that if they there and then repented of the abuses of :3, then He would establish a Messianic kingdom. The king who then sat on David's throne (:2) would become a Messianic style king, fulfilling the Messianic kingdom prophecy of Is. 66:20. Perceiving how near and real the Kingdom can be for us ought to elicit repentance. They were really close here at this point; and yet they refused, so hardened were they in the paths of continual sin.

*Jeremiah 22:5 But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says Yahweh, that this house shall become a desolation-* The most solemn and binding form of oath possible (Heb. 6:13-18). They could have the Messianic kingdom there and then (:4); or the destruction of the king's palace ["this house" of :1,2] and all they once held dear. The destruction of the "house", both the royal palace and family, meant an end to any hopes of the line of David continuing. At least for then. They had come to a T-intersection where they had to decide; whereas we would likely have just punished them for their sins and considered that their just desert.

*Jeremiah 22:6 For thus says Yahweh concerning the house of the king of Judah: You are Gilead to Me, the head of Lebanon. Yet surely I will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited-* God still found them so attractive, even though they had sinned awfully, building their "house" by abusing labourers (:13) and had to be destroyed. This was love itself. There is a parallel between "the house of the king" and the "cities"; the repentance of a minority, the royal family, could have led to the restoration of all Judah, and their continuance in sin meant the mass destruction of it. The entire society were guilty, and were not punished just because of the sins of the royal family; the masses did not suffer because of the sins of the minority. But God was prepared to work the other way around; the repentance of a minority could lead to blessing for a majority of sinners. This willingness of God in this regard came to its acme in the salvation of sinners for the sake of the obedience of just one man, His Son. And yet even though they did not repent, the "cities", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great city, Jerusalem, did not become literally a wilderness. The temple and great houses were burnt, but some people still lived there, such as the local

inhabitants encountered by Ezra when he returned to rebuild.

*Jeremiah 22:7 I will prepare destroyers against you, each one with his weapons; they shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire-* These were the cedars of Lebanon which God had found so attractive (:6). "Prepare" is literally 'sanctify'. Within the worldview of the attackers, they had sanctified their war against Judah in the names of their gods (s.w. Jer. 6:4 s.w.). But God worked through that, Himself sanctifying or preparing these men. The false prophets were wrong to claim that Jerusalem and the temple were sanctified by God and were therefore inviolate; God would sanctify the destroyers and their weapons so that it would all be destroyed.

*Jeremiah 22:8 Many nations shall pass by this city and shall say every man to his neighbour, Why has Yahweh done thus to this great city?-* This quotes Dt. 29:24, a curse for breaking the covenant (:9), and alludes to the specific judgment upon the temple (1 Kings 9:8). There is no particular example of this oft repeated curse coming true, apart from in Lam. 2:15, which appears to be spoken by Jeremiah in deep grief, and does not include the words predicted here and in :9. The actual destruction of Jerusalem and Judah was not as extensive as threatened; either God took pity, or there was a modicum of intercession or repentance which ameliorated the extent of the judgment. And that would explain why neither in the Bible nor other history is there any record of this happening.

*Jeremiah 22:9 Then they shall answer, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them-* See on :8. The idea was that the destroyed city and temple would be a silent witness to the power of Yahweh, and how this God who kept covenant was now as it were 'free' as His earlier people had betrayed Him and left Him without a people. The deserted city and ruined temple would therefore have been an invitation to observers to seek this Yahweh, and enquire whether they could enter a new covenant with Him, seeing His previous covenant with His people had been broken and He was now, as it were, unattached.

*Jeremiah 22:10 Don't weep for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who goes away into exile; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country-* Perhaps Jeremiah spoke these words in relation to a prominent funeral or memorial service for the dead, presumably that of Josiah who was killed trying to support the Egyptians against Babylon.

*Jeremiah 22:11 For thus says Yahweh touching Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, and who went forth out of this place: He shall not return there any more-* Shallum is the same as Jehoahaz. Perhaps he is called Shallum because that word means 'The one marked out for judgment'. See on :12. I explain on Ez. 4:6 that potentially, the captivity of Judah need only have lasted for 40 days or years, but this period was extended, just as it could have been reduced. But Jehoahaz was not going to experience this, he had precluded any reduction in his captivity period because of his impenitence at that time.

*Jeremiah 22:12 But in the place where they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more-* The false prophets were claiming that his exile was going to be very short lived and he would return to establish a Messianic kingdom, thus twisting the prophecies of the restoration which Jeremiah may have already given, along with those of Isaiah which were already extant.

*Jeremiah 22:13 Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his rooms by injustice; who uses his neighbour's service without wages, and doesn't give him his hire-* Jehoiakim had already demanded from his people a heavy tribute to the king of Egypt (2 Kings 23:35), whom he trusted in instead of in God; and now like Solomon he exacted forced labour from his own people so that he might have a luxurious palace built for himself. The prophets weren't just empty moralizers, bleating on about the state of the nation; their words are an assault of the mind and conscience. Amos speaks of judgment to come in dramatic terms 'just' because creditors sold their debtors into slavery just to recover the cost of a pair of shoes (Am. 2:6,7). Jer. 22:13-19 is a long and passionate condemnation of Jehoiakim for building an extension to his house, using his neighbours as workmen and not giving them the agreed wages. We see this sort of thing all the time. And shrug and think it good fortune it didn't happen to us. But that's not the spirit of prophecy.

*Jeremiah 22:14 who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious rooms, and cut out windows; and makes a ceiling with cedar, painted with vermilion-* This obsession with building his own house recalls that of Solomon. The only other mention of "vermilion" is in Ez. 23:14 where this is what was used to portray images of the idols upon the walls of the Jerusalem temple. The temple was famed for its cedars (:7), and so it was as if he was turning his house into an imitation temple. A "wide" house is literally a house built by measure, and this is the phrase used about the construction of the temple (1 Kings 7:9; 2 Chron. 3:3). "Rooms" is the term used for the "chambers" (s.w.) of the temple. "Cut out" or 'rendered' windows are what were intended for the temple of the restored kingdom (s.w. Ez. 40:25,29,33; 41:16 etc.). This is the classic path of apostasy- to justify the worship of our own home and luxury in the name of worshipping God.

*Jeremiah 22:15 Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar?-* The temple was famed for its cedar work (:7), and so it seems that by making his own house similar to the temple, the king was thinking that this would make his house and dynasty likewise inviolate. But this was mere religious tokenism.

*Didn't your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him-* He made the classic mistake of all materialists, thinking that he proved himself the rightful king by the degree of his ostentation and luxury. The implication could be that Josiah experienced all things "well with him" whilst he did justice; but when he started playing politics and supporting Egypt against Babylon, he no longer experienced this but rather died in shame. His trust in Egypt and human strength was therefore associated with no longer seeking justice for people. The two strands of thought and behaviour go together. For it is trust in God and not flesh which elicits justice in our behaviour towards others.

*Jeremiah 22:16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Wasn't this to know Me? says Yahweh-* See on :15. To know Yahweh means to have a relationship with Him and to respond in practice. This is the Hebraic sense of 'knowing' a person. The Jews of those times had done what many believers do today- assume that an intellectual knowledge of God and external ritualism is the same as knowing God. But it is our attitudes to the poor and needy which are the knowledge of God which the Bible has in view.

*Jeremiah 22:17 But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it-* The reason why the poor and needy were abused by the king was that he and his fellow rulers were covetous. Oppression, abuse and violence all flowed from an attitude of heart. Innocent blood was shed, referring not only to the babies sacrificed to fertility gods in the hope of better harvests and therefore more wealth, but death sentences were inflicted in return for bribes. The already wealthy king wanted yet more wealth. The acquisition of wealth is an addiction.

And so they went into captivity because the princes and priests oppressed the people (Jer. 21:12; 22:3,17); in the new temple, this was not to be so (Ez. 45:8). And yet, in Nehemiah's time the princes of the people did again oppress them, e.g. through making them mortgage their lands to them. This is the tragedy of Israel's refusal to learn... The intention was that they would "bear the punishment of their iniquity... that the house of Israel go no more astray" (Ez. 14:11).

*Jeremiah 22:18 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: they shall not lament for him saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! They shall not lament for him saying Ah lord! or, Ah his glory!-* This is structured as poetry, as if a mock funeral lament. Jeremiah uttered this prophecy during Jehoiakim's lifetime (Jer. 1:3). To so stridently criticize a king at the gates of his own palace was a brave thing to do. No wonder it brought Jeremiah such opposition; indeed it was but by God's protection that he was not murdered.

*Jeremiah 22:19 He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem-* Jehoiakim was not to be buried but his body thrown out to the elements, like an ass (Jer. 22:18,19; 36:29-31); but the idiom of "he slept with his fathers" (2 Kings 24:6) may imply that he had a more normal burial. This was a conditional prophecy.

*Jeremiah 22:20 Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up your voice in Bashan, and cry from Abarim; for all your lovers are destroyed-* Abarim was the mountain range in the south and Lebanon that in the north. Throughout the

entire land, including the former territory of the ten tribes, Jeremiah was to travel with the message: that all Israel's lovers, the nations surrounding her to whom she had prostituted herself in return for promises of support against Babylon, were to be destroyed.

*Jeremiah 22:21 I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, I will not hear. This has been your way from your youth, that you didn't obey My voice-* Before the drought of Jer. 14 came (and the book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically), Judah were prosperous; as prosperous (s.w.) as Sodom before she was destroyed (Ez. 16:49). Prosperity is directly related to refusing to hear God's word (Dt. 32:15); so we should be surprised if we as believers are relatively prosperous, and should consider this condition an exception rather than the rule in the lives of believers.

*Jeremiah 22:22 The wind shall feed all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity-* The false prophets claimed to be full of the wind / Spirit of God, but they would be filled with the wind which would carry them away. And one by one, the "lovers", the nations whom Judah hoped upon for salvation from Babylon, would be overcome by her and taken into captivity. This ought to have been warning as to what would happen to her, but they refused to hear the voice of God speaking to them through observed experience of their neighbours. His voice speaks to us like that today.

*Surely then you will be ashamed and confounded for all your wickedness-* Just as the Father thought that His people "surely" would reverence His Son, so He was 'certain' that if His people went to Babylon in captivity, "surely then you will be ashamed... for all your wickedness". But the reality was that they grew to like the soft life of Babylon and refused to obey the command to return to God's land. Such was and is the hopefulness of God. The exile didn't cause God's people to repent nor to know His Name. It wasn't the once-for-all program which He intended. Now none of this makes God out to be somehow not serious or unreliable. Rather is it all an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us. Thus God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him: "Thy lovers shall go into captivity: surely then shalt thou be ashamed and confounded for all thy wickedness" (Jer. 22:22). But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence my son" (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him.

*Jeremiah 22:23 Inhabitant of Lebanon, who makes your nest in the cedars, how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail!-* As in Zech. 11:1, the cedars of Lebanon in the temple resulted in the temple being called "Lebanon". The Jews thought that the temple was inviolate and that they could take refuge there; and the king's palace was a replica of the temple in this (see on :6,7,14). He likewise reasoned that his palace was inviolate. But God is no respecter of such literalism. The image is of a woman who dies in childbirth. But even within that figure, there is the Divine hope of new birth, of something coming out of it with whom He could work in restoring a renewed Israel. But even that hope was to be dashed, as the exiles of the next generation didn't respond, as Ezekiel's prophecy chronicles.

*Jeremiah 22:24 As I live, says Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet on My right hand, yet would I pluck you from there-* Coniah is also called Jeconiah, and then when he ascended to the throne, Jehoiachin. The kings of Judah were intended to be kings on behalf of God, His representatives on earth; and therefore they as it were carried His signet ring. But this is expressed in the conditional sense, because Coniah did not thus reign on God's behalf. God's intention was that at the restoration, the throne of David should be restored and Zerubbabel would have this signet ring and reign on God's behalf (Hag. 2:23). But that potential also didn't come about and was precluded by human weakness. The prophecy is therefore deferred and rescheduled to fulfillment in the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 22:25 and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of them of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans-* Their fear of Babylon was such that they were madly running to every nation who might help them against Babylon, eagerly accepting their gods as part of a contract in which they would receive their military help.

*Jeremiah 22:26 I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born;*

*and there you will die*- This was true, but he was shown great grace there in that he was released from prison (Jer. 52:31), perhaps because he repented. See on :12,30. His mother is also mentioned as going into captivity as his lack of spirituality was likely partly her fault.

*Jeremiah 22:27 But to the land to which their soul longs to return, to it they shall not return*- The same words are used of the desire of the common people to return (Jer. 44:14). "Return" is the word also used for repenting. This is the picture of all the rejected, the foolish virgins banging on heaven's door all too late, wanting to repent / return, but all too tragically late. Now is the day for repentance / returning.

*Jeremiah 22:28 Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? Is he a vessel in which none delights? Why are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they don't know?*- This could be quoting the imagined reaction of the Jews that their great king Coniah was being treated as a useless potsherd, a piece of broken pottery. But that was indeed how Israel and their king had been presented earlier- as a shattered earthen jar, broken by the Divine potter (Jer. 19:1). It could be that this is an interjection from Jeremiah, once again overly positive in his view of Israel; and even in that, he was somehow representing the view of God for His beloved people. Or these could be rhetorical questions, as if to enquire why Coniah was being treated like this. See on :29.

*Jeremiah 22:29 O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Yahweh*- What follows is a judgment of condemnation upon one man. But the people of the entire land were to "hear" this word and be led to repentance by considering the condemnation of another individual. And that is a challenge for us today as well.

*Jeremiah 22:30 Thus says Yahweh, Write you this man childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling in Judah*- I suggested on :26 that his release from prison in Babylon suggests he repented. And so this judgment didn't come true, in that he had children (1 Chron. 3:17) and Shealtiel is reckoned as his son and directly in the line of Messiah (Mt. 1:12), although it seems Jeconiah was not his natural father (Lk. 3:27-31). So we see again that judgment can be changed by repentance- in this life.

At the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne (Jer. 33:17); and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been "kings sitting for David upon his throne" (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17.

## Jeremiah Chapter 23

*Jeremiah 23:1 Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! says Yahweh-* Jeremiah was himself a priest, and this prophecy is particularly against them, his own people and family. No wonder it was they who wished to destroy him. Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10).

*Jeremiah 23:2 Therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people-* They did feed the people; the issue is therefore that they fed them wrongly, with false prophecies. It was the duty of the priests to teach the people, as represented by the figure of feeding.

*You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, says Yahweh-* They had not "visited them" with true Divine comfort, they had not manifested / revealed God to them, and so God would manifest / reveal Himself in judgment upon them.

*Jeremiah 23:3 I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries-* The exile of Judah into the nations comprising the Babylonian empire was considered as certain to happen, even though there was the possibility of repentance. This would be orchestrated by the Angels- the Angel of Israel is likened to a shepherd in Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:9-11 etc.

*Where I have driven them-* Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having 'driven out' Israel from their land (Jer. 23:2,3,8); the pastors' sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken. There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin. A personally 'righteous' believer may well be excluded from the Kingdom for the effect he has had on others.

*And will bring them again to their folds-* The "them" is defined in :6 as both Judah and the ten tribes. It was potentially possible, and was the Divine intention, that both groups would return from captivity at the same time and come to "their folds", perhaps an intensive plural for the one great fold, in Jerusalem. The same word is translated "holy habitation" with reference to Zion (Ex. 15:3; 2 Sam. 15:25; Is. 27:10; 33:20; Jer. 31:23).

*And they shall be fruitful and multiply-* They would then experience the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant, and would be part of a new creation, fulfilling the command to Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. They would enter a new covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, seeing they had broken the old covenant which was based upon the Mosaic law.

*Jeremiah 23:4 I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, says Yahweh-* "I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them"- rulers who would genuinely care for Israel like the master shepherd, the Angel, did (see on :3). Jeremiah was frequently moved to lament the false shepherds of Israel, which is understandable if the Angel shepherd of Israel inspired Jeremiah. He would have been deeply hurt at his flock being left to ruin by those to whom He had delegated His shepherding role (cp. how in Is. 63:9-11 both the Angel and Moses appear to be the shepherd that led Israel). But this potential didn't happen, and so the prophecy was reapplied to the great shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both 'to return' in the sense of returning to the land, and 'turning' in the sense of repentance. But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd 'causes me to repent' (Ps. 23:3 Heb.). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God *giving* Israel a new heart. And the Lord's amazing parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found- there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the 'return' of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God- He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace.

*Jeremiah 23:5 Behold, the days come says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land-* In contrast to the king at the time of Jeremiah who did not act like this but the opposite (Jer. 22:16,17). I suggested on Jer. 22:24 that the king in view was potentially Zerubbabel, "the branch of God from Babylon". Zech. 6:12 interprets this as a reference to Zerubbabel: "the man whose name is the branch... shall build the temple of the Lord". Zerubbabel being a king-priest was in the kingly line, and thus can correctly be called a king in the line of David (Mt. 1:12; Lk. 3:7; 'Sheshbazzar' of Ezra 1:8 is the Babylonian equivalent of 'Zerubbabel'; Ezra 3:8 describes his brothers as "priests and Levites"). Great prince Nehemiah humbly entered Jerusalem incognito on an ass (Neh. 2:11-15)- it is a wild speculation that Zerubbabel did the same, and thus provided a primary basis for Zech. 9:9 "Thy king cometh unto thee (also unrecognized, in the case of Jesus entering spiritually ruined Jerusalem)... lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass".

The majestic prophecy of Jer. 23:5-7 had prophesied that when Israel returned from Babylon, "the branch" would rise and save them "and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth", i.e. establish the Messianic Kingdom (cp. Ps. 72:2; Is. 9:7). But Zerubbabel, the "branch-from-Babylon", lead the people back from Babylon, half heartedly built a temple- which faithful men wept at, when they saw how feeble it was compared to that which should have been (Ezra 3:12). And then he beat it back to Babylon. Nelson's Bible Dictionary comments: "For some mysterious reason, Zerubbabel is not mentioned in connection with the Temple dedication. Neither is he mentioned after this time". The reason seems to be that he returned to Babylon. R.K. Harrison in the Zondervan Encyclopedia mentions that "a 6th century AD Jewish chronicle preserved the tradition that Zerubbabel returned to Babylonia after 515 BC and succeeded his father Shealtiel as the prince of the exiled remnant there". He chose to be a prince in Babylon's Kingdom, the kingdoms of men, rather than in the Kingdom of God. And so many have followed his decision in the centuries since, thus frustrating what could have been for them and many others within their influence. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.3) records that "Zorobabel, who had been made governor of the Jews that had been in captivity, came to Darius from Jerusalem, for there had been an old friendship between him and the king". He was friendly with the King of Babylon, and chose to follow where *this* lead rather than friendship with the Almighty. Compare this with how the 'friendliness' of a boss or worldly friend has lead so many into promotions or situations where they simply cannot do the work which God intended for them. See on Jer. 30:21.

*Jeremiah 23:6 In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name by which he shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness-* Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The idea of imputed righteousness developed by Paul in Rom. 1-8 is here foreseen. Israel had sinned grievously, and were largely impenitent. The only way they could be right with God was through the imputed righteousness of a "branch" of David (:5) who was completely righteous.

*Jeremiah 23:7 Therefore behold, the days come says Yahweh, that they shall no more say, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt-* The form of swearing in covenant relationship was to be changed. The same verses occur in Jer. 16:14,15 in the context of Judah being offered a new covenant, seeing they had broken the old covenant. That new covenant was to be made when the exiles left Babylon and the various nations within her empire where they had been scattered. But this didn't work out; because Judah refused it.

*Jeremiah 23:8 but, As Yahweh lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries where I had driven them. They shall dwell in their own land-* The new covenant was to be made once they left Babylon and the subject nations, just as the old covenant was made once they had left Egypt. There was intended to be some even more dramatic and powerful source of exodus in leaving Babylon than there had been in leaving Egypt. But in reality. nothing like the parting of the Red Sea or the plagues upon Egypt happened. The decree of Cyrus was clearly overruled by God, but other prophecies make it clear that the exodus of the exile was to be associated with the fall of Babylon. Indeed they were to flee Babylon so that they didn't share in her fall. And it was this dramatic action which was to convert the remnants of the Babylonian empire to Israel's God. But this didn't happen; instead this prophetic theme has been reapplied and rescheduled to the events of the last days.

*Jeremiah 23:9 Concerning the prophets. My heart within me is broken, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of Yahweh, and because of His holy words-* Faced with the wonderful potential future of :1-8, Jeremiah felt utterly overcome by the reality of the fact that the false prophets were teaching quite otherwise and were being eagerly believed, with resultant immoral behaviour (:10). We see here his sensitivity to the tragedy of the future and spiritual possibilities which God's people were missing. The "holy words" in view are the promise of imputed holiness or righteousness. We too should be deeply affected by the spurning of God's grace by His people.

*Jeremiah 23:10 For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness are dried up-* See on :9. The widespread adultery and swearing to other gods was a result of the false prophets of :9, who were eagerly believed rather than the amazing grace of Yahweh offered in :1-8. And already the drought of Jer. 14 had come. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological.

*Their way is evil, and their might is not right-* Human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. "One of the most striking and one of the most pervasive features of the prophetic polemic is the denunciation and distrust of power in all its forms and guises". "Not by might, says the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6; Mic. 7:16).

*Jeremiah 23:11 for both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house have I found their wickedness, says Yahweh-* Yahweh still referred to the temple as "My house", and according to Ezekiel the shekinah glory was there until the very end. Prophet and priest were related in that it was the duty of the priests to teach God's word, but they were instead teaching the word of the false prophets.

*Jeremiah 23:12 Therefore their way shall be to them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil on them, even the year of their visitation, says Yahweh-* This describes the downward spiral, an evil spirit from the Lord, which is the counterpart to the work of the holy Spirit from Him. God deceived prophets to speak things in His Name which were actually false (1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 14:9). He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them (Is. 66:3,4). God laid a stumbling block before the righteous man who turned to sin (Ez. 3:20), driving him along "slippery ways in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein: for I will bring evil upon them" (Jer. 23:12). Jeremiah feared God had deceived him (Jer. 20:7)- showing he knew such a thing was possible.

*Jeremiah 23:13 I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they prophesied by Baal, and caused My people Israel to err-* Samaria was already in captivity because of their false prophets. But they are paralleled with the false prophets of Judah (:14). Judah was persuaded that they were spiritually superior to the ten tribes because the temple was with them, and there were therefore inviolate. But this was not the case, and we noted on :6 that it was God's intention that Israel and Judah were to be united by the experience of repentance and acceptance of His grace.

*Jeremiah 23:14 In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that none does return from his wickedness: they are all of them become to Me as Sodom, and its inhabitants as Gomorrah-* See on :13. The widespread adultery amongst the people of :10 was therefore directly related to their being taught to do this by the Jerusalem prophets, who likewise were adulterers. This adultery was not so much a case of having affairs with neighbours as of sleeping with local women at the idol shrines. Repentance / returning from wickedness was so critical at this stage, and yet the spiritual leadership were encouraging impenitence.

*Jeremiah 23:15 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the prophets: Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall-* Maybe the Lord realized as He had the cup of gall on His lips that they were giving this to Him in the spirit of Jer. 23:15: to show that He was a false prophet. In this case, for the sake of His respect for the implications of Holy Scripture, He endured a far higher degree of pain. This judgment was taken by Him on the cross, who was there "the servant of Yahweh", which Israel had been intended to be. Wormwood and gall were what would be the result of false teachers encouraging the people to commit idolatry (Dt. 29:18). So they had fed themselves with these things, and their judgment to drink them was therefore God's confirmation of people in what they themselves had chosen. And that is how all His judgments operate. God's judgment is likened to drinking wormwood. But homeopathy has discovered that wormwood is a cure for some

forms of breast cancer and malaria- on the homeopathic principle that the actual trace elements of the illness can be the elements of the cure. God knew this of course when He describes His condemnation of men as a drinking of wormwood. There is something healing and therapeutic about judgment, even if it doesn't save the individual judged.

*For from the prophets of Jerusalem is ungodliness gone forth into all the land-* As noted on :10,14, the immoral teaching and example of the false prophets had spread into all the land because the priests chose to teach their false word to the people rather than God's true word which Jeremiah was preaching.

*Jeremiah 23:16 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Don't listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Yahweh-* This of course sounded like Jeremiah asking people to believe him and not the other prophets. Indeed that was the requirement made by "Yahweh of Armies", the God whose Angelic armies were controlling the armies of the Babylonians. The word of God is contrasted to words which come from our own heart. Man's natural imagination is not to be the source of truth, but rather it is God's word which is to be our authority. This is a warning required today, when human imagination and vision has been elevated to Divine proportions.

*Jeremiah 23:17 They say continually to those who despise Me, Yahweh has said, You shall have peace-* Those who despised Jeremiah were his own priestly relatives (Jer. 11:21,23). Those priests taught the word of the false prophets, who obviously hated Jeremiah. "Despise" is usually translated "provoke". Jeremiah was really hurt and provoked by the opposition of his family; and in that again he manifested Yahweh, who was likewise provoked by Israel (s.w. Dt. 31:20; 32:19).

*And to each one who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come on you-* The choice was between walking after God's word, or walking after their own hearts. This is where God's word is not like any other literature. It is to take a grip upon the human heart and to inculcate a way of thought which is contrary to our own natural heart or thinking. This points up the danger of using the Bible simply to reinforce our own natural ideas, whilst disregarding the rest. "Stubbornness" also can mean "imagination". Dt. 29:19 speaks directly of Judah at this time- when they heard the words of the curses for disobedience, they would think they would still have peace because they walked in the imaginations [s.w. "stubbornness"] of their own hearts. The false prophets were preaching exactly such "peace" (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). The heart [mind] is a fountain of imagination, of fantasy, and it is this which can be redirected by the influence of God's word and Spirit upon the human heart. But the sense of "stubbornness" in the Hebrew word for "imagination" shows that by exercising our own imaginations without the influence of God's word, we become set in those ways of thought, until they come to define us.

*Jeremiah 23:18 For who has stood in the council of Yahweh, that he should perceive and hear His word? Who has noted My word, and heard it?-* It was Jeremiah and not the false prophets who had done this. The first half of the verse is Jeremiah's thoughts; the second half is Yahweh speaking in response, confirming Jeremiah's thoughts. The true prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His "council" (see on :22), i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (Jer. 15:19; 23:18), of which we see a glimpse in the vision of the court of Heaven in 1 Kings 22:20-22. God's doctrines are described as a secret, a mystery; the Hebrew word used in this connection means 'A confidential plan revealed to intimate friends'; and yet they are revealed to the true believers (Am. 3:7,8; Jer. 23:18,22 AV mg.; Ps. 25:14; Eph. 3:3-6). Therefore the congregation of true believers is called "the secret assembly of the saints" (Ps. 89:7 Heb.). There are many Bibles around, but God's doctrines are to some extent a secret, and not understood by many of those who possess and read the Bible. It therefore follows that the Bible must be written in such a way as to conceal Truth from the majority of readers, because they don't wish to enter God's secret.

*Jeremiah 23:19 Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth. Yes, a whirling storm. It shall burst on the head of the wicked-* This is the same idea as the cherubim storm being used by Ezekiel to represent how the armies of Babylon had already "gone forth" and were about to burst over the wicked in Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of Yahweh shall not return, until He has executed, and until He has performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly-* There is a gap between God's statements and their execution, and in that gap there can be human repentance which means that the initial intentions or statements of God do not come about. But there had been no take up of that opportunity, and so the intents of God's heart

concerning judgment were to come true. In repentance, "in the latter days", this would be completely, clearly understood.

*Jeremiah 23:21 I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I didn't speak to them, yet they prophesied-* 'Running' is an idiom for receiving God's word (see on Hab. 2:2). If we receive God's word we are to run with it, to distribute it to others; that is axiomatic to truly receiving it. The false prophets 'ran' with their word, but it was their word and not Yahweh's.

*Jeremiah 23:22 But if they had stood in My council, then had they caused My people to hear My words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings-* See on :18. To truly receive God's word means to turn from evil. The word creates a response in those whom it impacts. But if people are caused to hear a false word, then they will not repent. Here in Jer. 23:18,22 we find prophets standing in the "council of the Lord" (RV) to receive His word; and yet this sounds very much like Angels standing in the court of Heaven to receive God's word of command. Likewise note the parallel between an Angel sitting under an oak and a prophetess sitting under an oak (Jud. 4:5 RVmg.; 6:11). "The God of the spirits [Angels] of the prophets sent his Angel" to the prophet John (Rev. 22:6 RV); implying that as God had sent His Angel-Spirits to inspire the prophets, so now He did to John. Ps. 147:15,18 speak of the sending out of God's word to melt snow and send rain; this must surely refer to the Angels being sent out from the court of Heaven to do these things. The way the "watcher and holy one" came down from Heaven is paralleled with the word of Divine command likewise coming down from Heaven (Dan. 4:23,31). The universe is not just ticking away on clockwork; the Angels are actively being sent out from Heaven to perform what may appear the most mundane and repetitious of things. Thus God sends out His Angels; He sends out His word; and He also sent out His prophets (Haggai- Hag. 1:12; Ezekiel- Ez. 3:5,6). God rose up and sent out His prophets (2 Kings 17:13; Jer. 7:25 and many others). He is described as doing this because those prophets likewise identified with the word and became part of their own message. See on Is. 9:7; Ez. 10:5.

*Jeremiah 23:23 Am I a God at hand, says Yahweh, and not a God afar off?*- This is a rhetorical question. The words for "near" (NEV "at hand") and "far" are as in Jer. 12:2 "You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart". This can be translated as them saying "You are near" with their mouths, when in fact they were far from God in their heart. This statement "You are near" was based on the much loved Dt. 4:7, which states that no God has Israel so "near" them (s.w.). Indeed Yahweh was near them- but they had to come near to Him in their hearts. He was "near" in that His word was to be near in their hearts and not far off from their hearts (Dt. 30:11,14 s.w.), but they were refusing His word through Jeremiah. The nearness of God is therefore potential, for man in response must also draw near unto Him (Ez. 42:13; 43:19 s.w.). But the grace of God was such that He would save them even from "far off" (Jer. 30:10 s.w.). Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

*Jeremiah 23:24 Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Don't I fill heaven and earth? says Yahweh-* This appears to be a quotation from or allusion to the words of the false prophets; or perhaps these words were never said, but they were the implied subconscious position of the people. We would all claim to believe that God sees and knows all things, and yet our behaviour and thinking at times implies we think there are "secret places" hidden from His view. Edom had the same mentality (Jer. 49:10). God had specifically warned them that their ways were not "hid" from His eyes (Jer. 16:17 s.w.). And yet Israel thought they could hide from Him (Jer. 23:24 s.w.).

*Jeremiah 23:25 I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in My name saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed-* "I have heard..." is the equivalent of God saying that they could not hide their ways from Him (:24). He heard every word they said, as He does to this day. And judgment is according to our words.

*Jeremiah 23:26 How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart?*- Again, the heart is the essential issue. We would likely have simply focused upon the fact that these people were liars, falsely claiming things convenient for them, in the name of God. But God's comment is that the lies were in their hearts, they were self deceived deep within their own self-talk, and were sharing that deceit with others.

*Jeremiah 23:27 Who think to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal-* They fiercely guarded the pronunciation of His Covenant Name; but in reality, they forgot that Name. And so with the temple; they so loved it, it was the apple of their eye; but in real principle, they desecrated all that it stood for. The Gentile destruction and desecration of it was only a material reflection of what they in principle had done; and the invasions were doubtless intended to teach Israel this. To forget Yahweh's Name is understood as worshipping other gods (Ps. 44:20 s.w.). The message of the false prophets was given in the name of Yahweh, and it was effectively saying that Yahweh was asking Judah to serve other gods in His Name. But by this they were forgetting His Name, for His Name as revealed to Moses expresses His character and the unique claim He thereby has upon His people. See on :39.

*Jeremiah 23:28 The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? says Yahweh-* This could simply be saying that the true prophet was to faithfully speak the word received. But there could also be the implication that in such an environment as described in :27, the true prophets (and there were others apart from Jeremiah, at least Ezekiel we know was contemporary with him) were tempted to not tell or speak forth the word they had received. And so they are encouraged that the true prophecies were as wheat to the straw of the false prophecies- the difference was evident. Another possibility is that the false prophet who had a dream should tell it just as it was, a dream he had had; whereas the true prophet should speak God's word faithfully. See on :30.

*Jeremiah 23:29 Isn't My word like fire? says Yahweh; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?-* The false prophets were speaking of "peace" coming as a result of worshipping idols, sanctioned by Yahweh (see on :27). The true word of God was by its nature more powerful in that it spoke of judgment to come; the hammer of Babylon (Jer. 51:20) was to crush Judah and burn Jerusalem and the temple with fire. The very demand of God indicated that it was His word. Peter understood this when He asks the Lord to invite him to walk on the water towards Him- He knew that such demands are typical of the true word of God.

*Jeremiah 23:30 Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who steal My words each one from his neighbour-* It could be that the false prophets were stealing some of Yahweh's true words from the true prophets who were their "neighbours", considered as prophets too; see on :33,36. And so there was a mixture of true and false words from Yahweh in their message; hence the idea of the true and false prophecies being divided like straw and wheat (:28). This has always been the attraction of false teaching- in that it is a mixture of the true and the false. Just as in our own failures and temporal apostasies we mix truth and error, flesh and spirit within our own reasoning and self-justification. For example, we may gossip whilst justifying ourselves as doing so because we have love for the recipient of our gossip.

*Jeremiah 23:31 Behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who use their tongues and say, He says-* The idea is that they used *their* tongues, or words, and yet said "He [God] says this...". They were exhibiting the same mentality which today claims that our own native thoughts and ideas are in fact God's; the pastor who claims he has had a word from the Lord asking him to get a new expensive car or watch...

*Jeremiah 23:32 Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says Yahweh, and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies-* As noted on :26, the heart was the essential issue. Their dreams arose from their own self deception deep within their own psychology, and yet they claimed these thoughts as those of God. We would likely have simply focused upon the fact that these people were liars, falsely claiming things convenient for them, in the name of God. But God's comment is that the lies were in their hearts, they were self deceived deep within their own self-talk, and were sharing that deceit with others.

*And by their vain boasting-* Of victory against the Babylonians.

*Yet I didn't send them, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all, says Yahweh-* The attraction to them of the false prophets was that they offered "profit". It was materialism and a chronic coveting of instant wealth which led them to idolatry, which the prophets taught. This was because those idols were fertility cults offering good harvests and prosperity in return for worshipping them. It was idolatry which "can't profit" (s.w. 1 Sam. 12:21; Is. 44:9,10; Jer. 2:8), and this was what the "lying words" were all about.

*Jeremiah 23:33 When this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask you saying, What is the burden of Yahweh?-* The conscience of the false prophets and the priests who taught their false words was not clear. Otherwise they would not have come to Jeremiah asking him what Yahweh's word really was. Perhaps they did so in order to steal some of his words of true prophecy and mix them with their own false prophecies (see on :30,36).

*Then you shall tell them, What burden! I will cast you off, says Yahweh-* Yahweh 'cast off' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.). And yet God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

*Jeremiah 23:34 As for the prophet, the priest and the people who shall say, The burden of Yahweh, I will even punish that man and his house-* Prophet, priest and people were all to be sharing God's word; all society was to be involved. The false prophets gave their words to the priests, whose duty it was to teach their words; and then the people spread those words further. This was how Israel should have been, with the ordinary people spreading the knowledge of God's word; and indeed this is the ideal situation of the Kingdom age (Jer. 31:34).

*Jeremiah 23:35 You shall say each one to his neighbour and each one to his brother, What has Yahweh answered? and, What has Yahweh spoken?-* The judgment upon them was that God's word would not be given to them in future. Instead of telling each other what they claimed was God's word, they would instead be asking each other if they had heard a word from God- and the answer would be in the negative, because the sun would go down over the prophets and His revelation would stop (Am. 8:12; Mic. 3:6). And yet this was a judgment which was deferred; because Ezekiel continued speaking God's word to the exiles, and the restoration prophets did so for another few generations. Yet here we have the impression that God was so angry with the false prophets and the eager belief of them, that He threatens to withdraw all true revelation. And yet He didn't at that time, although this word did come true in later generations.

*Jeremiah 23:36 You shall mention the burden of Yahweh no more: for every man's own word shall be his burden; for you have perverted the words of the living God, of Yahweh of Armies our God-* See on :35. Their perverting of God's word was through mixing His true words (which they stole from Jeremiah, see on :30,33) with their false words. By our words we will be justified or condemned. The false prophets were judged according to their words: "Every man's word shall be his burden" at the day of Babylonian judgment (Jer. 23:36). Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden- i.e., that of his own words.

*Jeremiah 23:37 You shall say to the prophet, What has Yahweh answered you? and, What has Yahweh spoken?-* This was a commandment; instead of claiming to have God's word in the form of the false prophecies, they were to instead be seeking it from the true prophets. See on :35.

*Jeremiah 23:38 But if you say, The burden of Yahweh; therefore thus says Yahweh: Because you say this word, The burden of Yahweh, and I have sent to you saying, You shall not say, The burden of Yahweh-* Instead of seeking to learn God's word as commanded in :37, they claimed that the burden or prophecies of Yahweh were with them. They had just been soberly warned not to do this; if they continued, there would be extreme punishment.

*Jeremiah 23:39 therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My presence-* Here and in :40, God speaks in the fire of His wrath. For to twist His words to the very opposite of their intention was terrible, and incited His anger, as it does today. By doing so, they had forgotten His Name (:27). And so God in response would forget them. But He says in Is. 49:18 that His love was such that He could not forget them even if they forgot Him. And has God cast away His people, as here threatened? Rom. 11:2 says that He has not.

*Jeremiah 23:40 and I will bring an everlasting reproach on you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten-* I explained on :39 that the twisting of Yahweh's words deeply provoked His anger, and He speaks here in that wrath. Hence He speaks of Judah being perpetually shamed; although He would "forget you" as His people (:39), He would never forget what they had done to Him. But we know that in that wrath He remembered mercy, and actually did not carry this out. For in the restoration of His people which He envisaged, their shame would be removed (Ez. 36:15). They would "bear their shame" for a limited period only (Is. 61:7; Ez. 39:26). This is the God of such passionate love that He can change His stated purposes about His people, because the pole of His saving pity is greater than that of His judgment.

## Jeremiah Chapter 24

*Jeremiah 24:1 Yahweh showed me and behold, two baskets of figs set before Yahweh's temple-* The allusion is to how the firstfruits were brought as offerings to the temple, to be first inspected by the priests. "First-ripe" in :2 is the same word translated "firstfruits". And Jeremiah as a priest was asked to make that inspection. The fig trees had been destroyed by the drought of Jer. 14 and by the earlier incursions of the Babylonians (Jer. 5:17; 8:13; Am. 4:9). That there were any figs to offer was therefore of itself a reflection of God's grace.

"Two baskets of figs were set before the temple of the Lord"; one representing the apostate Jews who remained in the land, and the other those who went to Babylon and who were intended to there revive spiritually. It seems that an Angel dwelt literally in the temple. This vision of two groups of Jews standing before an Angel is probably the basis of the vision of Zech. 3, where Joshua and the Jews eager to rebuild Jerusalem stand before the Angel, with the Satan standing there too. 'Satan' is often associated with apostate Jews in the New Testament.

*After that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and the princes of Judah-* This prophecy is therefore to be dated when Zedekiah ascended to the throne. But it clearly states that Zedekiah was to spiritually fail (:8). And yet Jeremiah often appeals to him to repent. If he had done so, then this prophecy wouldn't have come true. Throughout, this is a prophecy of potentials, the final outcome of which human repentance could have changed.

*With the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon-* As noted on Jer. 10:18, it was Babylonian policy to take into exile only the leadership and their families. I suggest that the craftsmen and smiths were also taken because they were the ones who had constructed the idols and shrines. Their specific judgment was also to deprive those who remained of their services, in a bid to elicit repentance from Zedekiah, who would otherwise stand condemned (:8). See on Jer. 25:6.

*Jeremiah 24:2 One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first-ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad-* There were three fig harvests / year. The ripe figs were freshly harvested, whereas the bad figs were either the immature fruit which was due for future harvest, or figs from the previous harvest. The eating of the offerings by the priests was to symbolize God's eating with Israel, His fellowship with them and acceptance of them. God would not accept / eat the bad figs, but He would accept the good ones.

*Jeremiah 24:3 Then Yahweh said to me, What do you see, Jeremiah? I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad, that can't be eaten, they are so bad-* The difference between the two types of figs was marked. And yet it is hard to perceive the fulfillment of this difference; Ezekiel's prophecies to those who had gone into captivity show that the early exiles of :5 were no better than Zedekiah's group who remained in the land; indeed in Ez. 18 those "good figs" complain that those left in the land were being punished unjustly. This prophecy therefore is about a potential fulfillment didn't come about.

*Jeremiah 24:4 The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The interpretation appears to have been given later. Perhaps literally the two baskets of figs were placed before the temple as an acted parable.

*Jeremiah 24:5 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so will I regard the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for good-* The first group of exiles didn't become so exceedingly good (:3) of themselves; it was because God decided to "regard" them like this; He would impute righteousness to them so that He saw them like this. The "good figs" were to be those who went to Babylon and through that experience there became "good figs". Micah speaks of the same process. Zion was to be plowed and Jerusalem become heaps, which happened in the Babylonian invasion. But then afterwards- 70 years afterwards- the temple was to be rebuilt, "the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains" (Mic. 3:12; 4:1). "In that day...will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather that has been driven out...and I will make her that was cast off a strong nation: and the Lord shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever...the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem". A Messianic Kingdom could then have come. This whole situation would be brought to pass because the daughter of Zion was to "go forth out of the city" of Jerusalem "and come even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered [RV rescued]: there shall the Lord redeem thee" (Mic. 4:10). How was the travailing daughter of Zion to be delivered / rescued in *Babylon* after having been taken captive there

from Jerusalem by the Babylonians? Surely in that there, God intended a spiritual revival of the people, there they would hear Ezekiel's appeal to repent, which if responded to would enable them to build the temple which he had described (Ez. 43:10,11) and thus usher in a Messianic Kingdom.

But there are several reasons to believe that this intended Divine program didn't work out- due to the lack of human response. For one thing, the majority of the Jews chose to remain in Babylon. They didn't return when they had the chance. And there is extra-Biblical evidence that they soon arose from their weeping by the rivers of Babylon, and wholeheartedly adopted the surrounding Babylonian beliefs and values. Further, in Esther's time, a decree was made to "destroy... and cause to perish" the Jews throughout the provinces of Persia / Babylon (Esther 3:13; 7:4). This phrase uses the two Hebrew words which we find together three times in the list of curses to be brought upon a disobedient Israel (Dt. 28:20,51,63). There evidently is a connection. And yet by her wonderful self-sacrificial mediation, Esther brought about the deferment and even annulment of those justifiable curses. God's prophetic word was again changed- due to a mediator, who of course pointed both backwards to Moses, and forwards to the Lord Jesus.

The prophecy of Jer. 29 is addressing the same two groups as in Jer. 24; the captives were intended to repent and become the good figs, whereas Zedekiah and his courtiers who remained in Jerusalem would become the bad figs (Jer. 29:17). But that prophecy was only potentially true. Because now in Jer. 29:21-32 Jeremiah warns the exiles, those who were supposed to become good figs, that they were tolerating false prophets and following them.

*Jeremiah 24:6 For I will set My eyes on them for good-* To set the eyes upon for good, "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

*And I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up-* Jer. 18:9 makes it clear that this was conditional; if God promises building and planting, then the potential activity of God in this regard would cease if the people were disobedient. Which they were. Had the first exiles truly been good figs, then they would have been built, planted and never plucked up again in the restored kingdom under the new covenant God was offering them (s.w. Jer. 31:28). And the same promise is made to those called here the bad figs, the Jews who remained in the land- they too could have been planted, built and not plucked up again if they resisted the temptation to flee to Egypt (s.w. Jer. 42:10). So this entire prophecy of the figs was not prescriptive, it was God's vision of what was possible, but it was precluded by a lack of repentance amongst the exiles, as Ezekiel laments so often. And likewise, the bad figs need not have been as they were; they could have had the blessings of the good figs.

Ezra 9:8 says that "And now *for a little space* grace hath been shewed from the LORD our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage". Ezra saw that "little space" as a time when they received *grace*; he understood the prophecy of the figs in Jer. 24, that it was only through the captivity and the fact God had graciously not destroyed them but rather preserved them there, that there was the opportunity for a remnant to re-establish the Kingdom. What may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God's grace to us, when spiritually discerned- whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet. Yet it should be noted that the prophecy of Jer. 24:6,7 about the good figs seems not to have come true at the restoration- although it could potentially have done so.

*Jeremiah 24:7 I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am Yahweh: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to Me with their whole heart-* The gift of a new heart was that associated with acceptance of the new covenant by the repentant exiles (Jer. 31:33; 32:39; Ez. 11:19; 36:26). But they refused that new covenant, and so it was reapplied and offered to a new Israel formed through the Lord's death. The intention was that they would return to God, and therefore return to the land and enter this new covenant, which would involve God working directly upon their hearts, giving or 'putting in' their hearts His word and love for Him. This is still on offer today, through the gift of the holy Spirit given to all who truly accept the same new covenant in the blood of the Lord Jesus. But that was all potentially possible for the first group of exiles who went into Babylon; but

they would not.

*Jeremiah 24:8 As the bad figs, which can't be eaten, they are so bad, surely thus says Yahweh, So will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt-* This was a subversion of their understanding, that those who had gone into captivity were sinners and they who remained were thereby declared righteous. It was God's intention that the opposite be the case. And yet Zedekiah was repeatedly appealed to for repentance, so that this scenario would not happen. Again we have to conclude that there is a large conditional element in prophecies. The people of Jerusalem and those who had gone to Egypt likewise were not all destroyed. Jeremiah went down into Egypt with them and so far as we know, he was preserved. The reference may be to Jews who had gone to Egypt earlier with Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:34).

*Jeremiah 24:9 I will even give them up to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil; to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them-* This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

*Jeremiah 24:10 I will send the sword, the famine, and the plague, among them, until they be consumed from off the land that I gave to them and to their fathers-* "Consumed" clearly means 'destroyed' (Jer. 27:8; 36:23; 44:12,18 etc.). But yet again we see that in wrath God remembered mercy. Zedekiah was not destroyed but went into exile in Babylon and died there apparently of natural causes. God's plans are open ended, to always allow scope for human repentance; and somehow intertwined with that is His eagerness to respond to mediation from faithful third parties, as well as the simple fact of His extreme pity for human situations, arising out of His grace and love toward His people.

## Jeremiah Chapter 25

*Jeremiah 25:1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, King of Judah (the same was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon)-* This was the time of the battle of Carchemish when the Egyptian army was destroyed, and it ought to have been obvious that Egypt was not going to save Judah from Babylon. Dan. 1:1 speaks of the third year, but the difference depends upon how one expresses some time in between the third and fourth years. This was the year when Daniel and the exiles were taken into captivity.

*Jeremiah 25:2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah, and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying-* He was going to announce that their exile and the Babylonian victory was now certainly going to happen. We wonder whether he travelled around Judah with this message in order to get it out to "all the people of Judah". See on :5.

*Jeremiah 25:3 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years, the word of Yahweh has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; but you have not listened-* We often ask in Jeremiah: 'Who is speaking? Jeremiah, or God?'. Their minds were clearly so intertwined. Both of them are described, in consecutive verses, as rising up early to plead with Israel (Jer. 25:3,4). It was God who rose up early and spoke, but His effort was manifest in that of Jeremiah. This is how close we can come to God if we sincerely work with Him and for His cause, seeing things from His perspective. There is no hint that a single person responded to Jeremiah's ministry; a great encouragement to us to persevere regardless of response to our ministry.

*Jeremiah 25:4 Yahweh has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them (but you have not listened-* Perhaps there were other prophets apart from Jeremiah who were also preaching at this time; probably Habakkuk. See on :3.

*Nor inclined your ear to hear)-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Jeremiah 25:5 saying, Return now each one from his evil way and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that Yahweh has given to you and to your fathers, from of old and even for evermore-* If they returned to God in repentance, then they would return from exile to the land. But this is spoke of even before they went into exile, as it were already the case. The promise of eternal inheritance in the land was only going to be true for those who wanted to be in the land. The appeal was to individuals- "each one". They were to realize that they as individuals had a part in the fate of the nation; they couldn't consider that God was simply dealing with the leadership and they were unable to change outcomes. Hence the double emphasis in :1,2 upon the appeal being to all the people.

*Jeremiah 25:6 and don't go after other gods to serve them or worship them, and don't provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands; and I will do you no harm-* Again we see that idolatry is in essence a trust in our own works rather than in God. This is why idolatry is in essence an abiding temptation for all ages. It also explains why as noted on Jer. 24:1, the "smiths" who made the idols were taken into captivity so that they could not create any more such works of their hands. The "harm" or "evil" was to be done by God, who is the author of good and evil in this sense (Is. 45:5-7)- a concept impossible to understand by those who believe in a cosmic Satan figure.

*Jeremiah 25:7 Yet you have not listened to Me, says Yahweh; so that you provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own hurt-* All sin is to our own hurt or evil. The hurt / harm evil brought by Yahweh (:6) was but an extension of their own choices. Jeremiah is presented as making no converts; he "sat alone" (Jer. 15:17). Not only

was their perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel's enemies. Their message was therefore rejected. Jeremiah lamented: "For twenty three years... the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened" (Jer. 25:3-7). The prophets saw the love of God, but saw too how Israel spurned it and refused to understand it. It must've been a tragic and awful experience.

*Jeremiah 25:8 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies: Because you have not heard My words-* There is a crucial difference between hearing and obeying. They heard the words, as we can, but without really hearing.

*Jeremiah 25:9 Behold, I will send and take-* Who was sent forth to take the northerners to invade Judah? Presumably an Angel. The same phrase is used of God sending forth an Angel to take a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:7,40). But in reality, it was Jeremiah who was sent to take a cup of wine to those nations (s.w. Jer. 25:15,17). Jeremiah was therefore following in the steps of the Angel, just as we do when we go on missions which are clearly God's will.

*All the families of the north, says Yahweh-* "Babylon" was not a pure nation but a coalition of various tribes.

*And I will send to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant-* Judah liked to imagine that *they* were the "servant of Yahweh" spoken of in Isaiah's recent prophecies. But this didn't make them God's people and therefore inviolate from judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was also Yahweh's servant but would be judged for his actions.

*And will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations-* The surrounding nations were those whom Judah had hoped would save them from Babylon, with whom they had committed whoredom by making contracts with them and accepting their gods.

*Jeremiah 25:10 Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp-* Every humble home had at least a candle burning at night; the idea was that as with the destruction of Sodom, judgment would come suddenly, whilst they were marrying and giving in marriage. That 'suddenness' is a theme of other prophecies; but in reality, Jerusalem fell predictably and inevitably after a period of siege. This was another element of the judgments which wasn't carried out quite as stated, because in wrath God remembered mercy.

*Jeremiah 25:11 This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years-* As explained on :12, this time period didn't literally come true. It was a potential, one of many possible scenarios. The nations around Judah didn't serve Babylon for 70 years. If the exiles had repented as intended, and had brought the other nations to accept Yahweh, then this may have been the scenario. But that didn't happen, and so as explained on :12, the period was recalculated and reinterpreted. And as noted on Jer. 10:18, the land was not completely desolate for the 70 year period. A 70 year period of desolation for Tyre in Is. 23:17 likewise didn't have a literal fulfillment because various unstated preconditions weren't met.

*Jeremiah 25:12 It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate forever-* From BC606, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (:1), to the fall of Babylon in BC539, is 67 years, not 70. So there was some flexibility in the time period. Yet the same 70 year period is mentioned in Jer. 29:10 in a prophecy apparently given 11 years later than that of Jer. 25:12.

The 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. See on Jer. 27:7. From the fall of Nineveh (612) to the fall of Babylon (539) was 73 years; or from Nebuchadnezzar's accession (605) to Babylon's fall (539) was 66 years (Dates taken from John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 209). Was there a degree to which the period was prolonged or decreased, due to unstated variables- perhaps prayer, Judah's repentance, Babylon's repentance...?

Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over

Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. And yet there again, Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years (Ez. 4:5), although there's no sign it ever did. And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. In fact, if a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap' (Ez. 22:30), God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. There were simply so many possible scenarios!

*Jeremiah 25:13 I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations-* These are clearly the words written in the prophecies against Babylon and the other nations at the end of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically; Jer. 25:13 sounds as if "this book" of Jeremiah had been finished at this point.

*Jeremiah 25:14 For many nations and great kings shall make bond servants of them, even of them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their hands-* Babylon would no longer be Yahweh's servant, but would become the servants of other nations; see on :9. "Even of them" can be translated "of them also". The idea is that what was done to Israel by Babylon would be done to Babylon. But that isn't really what happened when the Medes took Babylon and the Persian empire then came to dominate Babylon. "Babylonians" weren't put into forced labour throughout the Persian empire; "make bond servants of them" is the language of what Egypt did to the Hebrews (Ex. 1:14). God's intended judgments of Babylon, as those He stated about Judah at this time, were ameliorated. Or we could say they were rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

*Jeremiah 25:15 For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel to me: Take this cup of the wine of wrath at My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it-* As noted on :9, God had "sent" His Angel to "take" the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was following in the Angel's steps. See on :17.

There can only be two exits from the Lord's throne, to the right or to the left, and likewise we are faced with such a choice in our response to the bread and wine. The cup of wine is a double symbol- either of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25), or of condemnation (Ps. 60:3; 75:8; Is. 51:17; Jer. 25:15; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). Why this use of a double symbol? Surely the Lord designed this sacrament in order to highlight the two ways which are placed before us by taking that cup: it is either to our blessing, or to our condemnation. Each breaking of bread is a further stage along one of those two roads.

*Jeremiah 25:16 They shall drink, and reel back and forth, and be mad-* "Reel back and forth" is literally to be troubled (s.w. Job 34:20). What is in view is the dread fear of those who know they are about to receive Divine condemnation. "Mad" is the Hebrew *halal* which is usually used about praise (s.w. Jer. 20:13) which the nations shall finally give (Jer. 31:7 s.w.), although it can carry the sense of 'raving'. If madness was solely in view, another word would have been used. Perhaps the word choice was again to hint that they could come to repentance and praise of Yahweh as a result of the judgments- if they responded rightly.

*Because of the sword that I will send among them-* Jeremiah was "sent" with the prophetic word to these nations (:15); but the sword was likewise "sent". Here again we see the power of God's word; it is itself its fulfillment. This bracketing together of word and fulfillment explains why we can so positively consider that we "have" eternal life now whereas it is promised as a future experience.

*Jeremiah 25:17 Then took I the cup at Yahweh's hand, and made all the nations to drink, to whom Yahweh had sent*

me- As noted on :9, God had "sent" His Angel to "take" the Babylonians, and Jeremiah was following in the Angel's steps. If Jeremiah literally did this, it would have been a major and dangerous mission, taking much time. It could be understood as all happening only in vision.

*Jeremiah 25:18 Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and its kings, and its princes, to make them a desolation, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day-* Judah was to suffer the judgments of the surrounding nations; just as those of the new Israel shall be "condemned with the world" which they had likewise identified with in their days of opportunity. The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

*Jeremiah 25:19 Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people-* They are mentioned first amongst the Gentile nations because it was upon them that Judah had placed so much hope, rather than in Yahweh, for deliverance from Babylon.

*Jeremiah 25:20 and all the mixed people, and all the kings of the land of Uz, and all the kings of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod-* These towns were very near to Judah, and it seems Judah had tried to forge a coalition from these peoples against Babylon. They had made covenants with them all, on condition that Judah worshipped their idols. We can imagine this kind of thing going on in the latter day fulfillment of these words; Israel facing off against a superior enemy, seeking help from even the Palestinians / Philistines, rather than throwing themselves in repentance upon Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 25:21 Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon-* These nations were active in assisting the Babylonians destroy Jerusalem (Ps. 137:7). But Judah had sought to make a covenant with them whereby they would fight against Babylon in their defence. The lovers turned against Judah the prostitute and helped burn her with fire. This is all the stuff of politics... whereas faith in Yahweh was to be supreme.

*Jeremiah 25:22 and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the isle which is beyond the sea-* Or, by the sea coast. Perhaps the minor kings confederate with Tyre and the Phoenicians are in view.

*Jeremiah 25:23 Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all who have the corners of their beard cut off-* In Jer. 9:26, Judah are listed as a nation who trimmed their beards like this, rather than being circumcised in heart. The surrounding nations had their various signs of identification, often connected with how their hair or beards were cut. The sign of identity God had chosen was not visible; it was upon the most concealed part of the male body. And this spoke of how the real sign of identity as God's people was in fact nothing external, but in the state of heart, a way of thinking with the flesh cut off from it. This is why we may look the same as others in this world, on some counts. But the difference is in our hearts.

*Jeremiah 25:24 and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed people who dwell in the wilderness-* These peoples were confederate with Babylon (Jer. 51:37), but they are listed here as peoples with whom Judah had tried to make an alliance against Babylon. They turned against Judah and backed Babylon in the end, and then were destroyed by Babylon and by the destruction of Babylon at the hands of the Medes. All this kind of political intrigue will have its fulfillment in the last days too, and would be absolutely typical of Middle Eastern politics.

*Jeremiah 25:25 and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes-* These peoples had not yet developed into "Persia"; they were then just small tribes to the west of Babylon who were known to be against Babylon. And so Judah had sought their assistance against Babylon. The range of nations is lengthy, and reflects the desperate and extensive measures used by Judah to get human help against Babylon.

*Jeremiah 25:26 and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another-* These nations all had their part in the

Babylonian invasion, which is why they were to be punished in the end after Israel's restoration from captivity (Jer. 25:12). Ezekiel was prophesying about the time of the restoration- after 38,39 he goes on to give commands about how to rebuild the temple on their return from captivity. This is the context in which Ezekiel alludes back to Jer. 25.

*And all the kingdoms of the world, which are on the surface of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them-* "Sheshach" is a code name for Babylon. The Jewish kabbalists had a system called atbash, whereby the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is read as the last one, the second letter as the second to last letter, etc. "Sheshach" is the spelling of "Babylon" according to this; and yet the word *sheshach* means "humiliation", which was to happen to Babylon (Is. 47:1). We wonder why Jeremiah at times uses this term whereas at other times he is clear that he refers to "Babylon". If he was scared of repercussions, then we wonder why at times he does refer to "Babylon". I suggest therefore that he is simply making the point that proud Babylon was to be humiliated. For the essence of all human sin is pride, and judgment is therefore about humiliating pride. And we are to humble ourselves now.

*Jeremiah 25:27 You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel: Drink, and be drunk, vomit, fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you-* The drunkard is initially attracted to the cup of wine, and so these nations eagerly accepted a part in the coalition to destroy Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 25:28 It shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: You shall surely drink-* Even if they perceived that temporary union with Babylon would be to their hurt (see on :27), they would still be punished for their sins.

*Jeremiah 25:29 For, behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by My name; and should you be utterly unpunished?-* This could imply that the sin of the surrounding nations was like that of Judah; but Jer. 2:10 has stated that Judah's sin was greater than theirs. So perhaps there is here too the hint that their sin was slightly less, but they would not be unpunished.

*You shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth, says Yahweh of Armies-* Ezekiel 38:21 says that a sword will be called for against Gog and thus he will meet his end. This is quoting from Jer. 25:29, where the context is of a group of surrounding nations invading the land and a sword being called upon them. There are several other links with the nations of Ezekiel 38 when we look closer at Jer. 25:19-26. Edom, Moab, Ammon, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish feature in Ez. 38 too, and this confirms by suggestion there that we are to read the text as suggesting that Sheba, Dedan and the merchants are part of the invading force in Ezekiel 38, not against it.

*Jeremiah 25:30 Therefore you must prophesy against them all these words and tell them, Yahweh will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will mightily roar against His fold; He will give a shout, as those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth-* This would have been difficult for them to understand; the god of a city was supposed to defend his city. But Yahweh who lived in Zion, His holy habitation, would roar against His own people; and His wrath with Jerusalem would then go out against all the peoples of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, whose idols Judah had worshipped and brought into Zion.

*Jeremiah 25:31 A noise shall come even to the end of the land; for Yahweh has a controversy with the nations-* "Controversy" is a legal case (s.w. Ex. 23:2). It was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31) and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

*He will enter into judgment with all flesh: as for the wicked, He will give them to the sword, says Yahweh-* 'Entering into judgment' is s.w. "plead". Condemnation is in a sense God's appeal to us. Ezekiel often uses the word in speaking of how God will judge / condemn Israel. But he uses the same word when he speaks of how He will "plead" with Israel in their captivity in Babylon, i.e. in their condemnation experience (Ez. 17:20); how He will plead with them as He pleaded with them whilst they were undergoing judgment in Egypt (Ez. 20:35,36- s.w. "judge" Ez. 20:4); and how He will "judge" or "plead" with Israel's latter day invaders through the punishments He

will bring upon them (Ez. 38:22). When God gives those wicked people to the sword, He will be pleading / judging with "all flesh" (Jer. 25:31); "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead [s.w. judge] with all flesh" (Is. 66:16). They will be gathered to the valley of Jehoshaphat, so that the Lord can "plead [s.w. judge] with there for my people" (Joel 3:2).

*Jeremiah 25:32 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great storm shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth-* As explained on :31, all the nations were to be implicated in this great assize, and all were to be punished. The great storm from the borders of the land refers to the Babylonians, but the language of approaching storm is expressed by Ezekiel in terms of the cherubim of glory, Yahweh of hosts of heavenly armies, who was manipulating the Babylonian armies. In the latter day fulfillment, the final invader of Israel will be a group of nations orchestrated by a power likewise just beyond the borders of the *eretz*, somewhere like Iran.

*Jeremiah 25:33 The slain of Yahweh shall be at that day from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground-* This was the judgment to come upon Judah (Jer. 8:2) but the idea is that the Gentile nations were to suffer the same judgment as Judah. There was to be no differentiation between Judah and the world around her when it came to judgment; because she had so fully entered into unity with them. Being left unburied was the ultimate shame for Middle Eastern folks of that time; perhaps the implication is that there would be such mass destruction that there would be none left to do the burying. And yet this scale of destruction didn't happen after Jerusalem fell and Babylon turned upon its own coalition. The prophecy will come to its final term in the last days.

*Jeremiah 25:34 Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow in dust, you principal of the flock-* The focus now returns to Israel, the "fold" of Yahweh whom He Himself would destroy (:30,37). The wallowing in the dust may have been a call to repentance; for this was the behaviour which Jeremiah here urges, rather than what was to happen in any case. Even though their destruction and dispersion was now certain, it seems they could still have repented, and thereby ameliorated the nature of that judgment. This self humiliation was to be practiced by the "principal" or "great ones" of the flock. They were themselves to repent of their pride.

*For the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are fully come, and you shall fall like a goodly vessel-* "Dispersions" is the word used of the people at Babel (Babylon) being scattered abroad (Gen. 11:4,8). Whilst the prophecy here seems to apply specifically to the shepherds of Israel (:34), it could be that the leaders of all the nations are in view. They were to fall as did Babel, and would be scattered from her. Consistently, the idea of scattering is used as part of condemnation; and true unity, therefore, is a sign of blessing. Division is therefore bringing about the self-condemnation of any believing community. In the specific context of Judah, the "dispersion" was not just into exile, but is used of the scattering of Zedekiah's family and army (2 Kings 25:5). But the pastors / shepherds of Judah had already scattered the people (s.w. Jer. 23:1,2; Ez. 34:21). Their scattering in judgment was only what in essence they had done themselves.

*Jeremiah 25:35 The shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape-* This in the primary application speaks of the capture of Zedekiah and the "principal of the flock" (a phrase perhaps specifically referring to him) as they sought in vain to flee (2 Kings 25:5). But it will come to final term in the last days. A desire to escape but having no place to run is a feature of the rejected at the last day (Heb. 2:3, quoting Is. 20:6 concerning the inability of men to escape from the approach of the invincible Assyrian army). Rev. 20:11 likewise speaks of the rejected 'heavens and earth' fleeing from the Lamb's throne and finding no place to go. Before the whirlwind of God's judgment, the false shepherds of Israel "shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape" (Jer. 25:35). The rejected will see that the Lord is coming against them with an army much stronger than theirs, and they have missed the chance to make peace (Lk. 14:31). They will be like the Egyptians suffering God's judgments in the Red Sea, wanting to flee but having no realistic place to run to. Uzziah hasting to go out from the presence of the Lord after he was judged for his sin was a foretaste of this (2 Chron. 26:20).

*Jeremiah 25:36 A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the principal of the flock! For Yahweh lays waste their pasture-* All throughout, it is Yahweh who is the "destroyer" [s.w. "lay waste"] through the hand of the surrounding peoples (s.w. Jer. 15:8). This was in radical tension with the idea that a local god is always supportive

of his people and always saves them. The God of Israel reveals a sensitivity to sin as fundamental to His character; and therefore He will judge and even destroy His own people rather than save them from their invaders.

*Jeremiah 25:37 The peaceable folds are brought to silence because of the fierce anger of Yahweh-* An intensive plural for the one great fold, of Zion (:30). "Jerusalem" mean literally "city of peace". The Biblical idea of peace is of peace between God and man, achieved through faith in His provided reconciliation. This had been spurned by Judah, and so His anger was such that "Jerusalem" could no longer be the city of peace; the intended fold of His sheep was to be "brought to silence" or "cut off" (s.w.). Yet it was Jeremiah who sat in silence in the ruins of Zion (Lam. 3:28 s.w.), totally identified with his sinful and judged people, in response to how there was to be no funeral wailing for the dead but rather, silence (Ez. 24:17).

*Jeremiah 25:38 He has left His den, as the lion; for their land has become an astonishment because of the fierceness of the oppression, and because of His fierce anger-* The "He" in view is both Yahweh and the lion of Babylon. The invaders had now left their den in Babylon. Jeremiah could see it all, and sought to share his vision with Judah, in the desperate hope that they might repent even on their deathbeds, as it were. Because the Jews had oppressed their brethren, they were to be oppressed (Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7; 22:7 s.w.). Our attitudes to our brethren likewise will be directly reflected back to us at the day of judgment.

## Jeremiah Chapter 26

*Jeremiah 26:1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from Yahweh saying-* Jer. 26:2-6 is a summary of the material in Jer. 7:1-15. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically.

*Jeremiah 26:2 Thus says Yahweh: Stand in the court of Yahweh's house and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in Yahweh's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them-* This was probably not one of the outer gates, but one of the three gates which led from the inner court to the outer. Probably it was the gate where Baruch later recited the prophecies of Jeremiah, called "the new gate of the Lord's house", located in the "upper" i.e. inner court (Jer. 36:10 cp. 26:10). Probably the time was one of the three great feasts, when the people of Judah would have come up to the temple.

*Don't diminish a word-* Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others' salvation is not dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching. This is true to the extent that a watchman can occasion the death of those he could warn, if he doesn't do it. And their blood [for they will die] *will be required* at his hand (Ez. 33:8,13). The wicked will only turn from their ways if the watchmen warns them- and Ez. 33 shows clearly enough that the watchman can be lazy to fulfill his commission, with the result that some will die eternally who need not have done so. It's not that another watchman is raised up to do the job- it is his responsibility, which he can discharge or not. God's word has been delegated to us; to not speak it forth is therefore in a sense to diminish His word. Hence Jeremiah is told to "keep not back a word" of all God's words (Jer. 26:2 AV; RV: "Diminish not a word"). Jeremiah is warned to "diminish not a word, if so be..." Israel may repent. His temptation of course was to water down the message which he had to deliver. But only the harder, more demanding side of God might elicit response in them. By making the message less demanding, it wouldn't have any chance of eliciting a response.

*Jeremiah 26:3 Perhaps they will listen, and turn every man from his evil way; so that I may repent Me of the evil which I purpose to do to them because of the evil of their doings-* See on Jer. 18:8. God is willing to totally forgive the repentant sinner. He could just forgive men; it is within His power to do this. But He doesn't. He allows His power to do this to be limited by the extent of our repentance. "If so be they will hearken, and turn every man from his evil way, that I may repent me of the evil which I purpose to do unto them" (Jer. 26:3). Likewise "Repent ye therefore... and be converted, *that* your sins may be blotted out... Repent therefore... and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart *may* be forgiven thee" (Acts 3:19; 8:22). The ability of God to forgive is controlled by our repentance ("that... may"). This is used by Peter as the source of appeal for men to repent.

Paul used the terror of possible condemnation to persuade men (2 Cor. 5:11). Interestingly, the very words which Jeremiah was tempted not to speak forth, so stern was their message of judgment to come, were what had the power to lead Israel to repentance (Jer. 26:2,3).

*Jeremiah 26:4 You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you-* Properly 'listening' means 'walking' in practice. There is an acute difference between literally hearing and spiritually listening. The more familiar we are with the text of scripture, the stronger the temptation not to actually "listen". The law set before them may not refer to the Mosaic law, which was the basis of the old covenant which they had broken. Perhaps it refers to the new covenant, the new deal, which God through Jeremiah was setting before that generation.

*Jeremiah 26:5 To listen to the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you, even rising up early and sending them, to which you have not listened-* The emphasis is upon the prophets who were Yahweh's servants; because the false prophets were a major problem. The people preferred to listen to their words, rather than those of Yahweh's true prophets.

*Jeremiah 26:6 then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth-* The ark had earlier been kept at Shiloh, and there the tabernacle was pitched (Jud. 18:31; 1 Sam. 1:3). God

apparently destroyed the tabernacle there (Ps. 78:60) because of the kind of apostasy there practiced by Eli and his sons. Judah assumed that Jerusalem was inviolate, and was chosen by God over the worship system of the ten tribes in Samaria. But mere physical location and tradition do not make us inviolate to Divine judgment.

*Jeremiah 26:7 The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Yahweh-* The connection between priests and prophets was that the priests were to teach the word of Yahweh, and the false prophets gave them a false message to teach.

*Jeremiah 26:8 It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Yahweh had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him saying-* We note that "all the people" were connected with the false prophets and their preachers, the priests. The "people love to have it so", and therefore the priests and prophets said what the people wanted to hear (Jer. 5:31). This is why all society was to be punished.

*You shall surely die-* The words of condemnation spoken by God to Adam. They were not only playing God, saying what *they* thought and felt in the name of God; but we see how they considered any criticism of them to be the ultimate sin, like Adam's disobedience in Eden.

*Jeremiah 26:9 Why have you prophesied in the name of Yahweh saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant? All the people were gathered to Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh-* The implication was that they considered he was just speaking his words, whereas the true word of Yahweh was what they were speaking. We see here the power released by a guilty conscience- a mass desire to shoot the messenger, to avoid by all means the confrontation with God which sinful living must provoke. The desire to shoot the messenger and discredit the message is the same in essence behind those who wish to rubbish the Bible as the words of men and not of God. This has a subconscious moral basis to it.

*Jeremiah 26:10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of Yahweh; and they sat in the entry of the new gate of Yahweh's house-* The idea is that they sat in judgment. They heard the case brought by the false prophets, priests and people. They heard the case in the temple rather than in the king's palace because it was distinctly religious, and they were seeking a death penalty prescribed by the Mosaic law.

*Jeremiah 26:11 Then spoke the priests and the prophets to the princes and to all the people saying, This man is worthy of death; for he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears-* The princes were sitting in judgment, and the people were the audience. They were arguing that anyone who prophesied against Jerusalem was worthy of death. But it was God who had prophesied more than any against Jerusalem, through various prophets and not just Jeremiah. They were effectively wishing the death of God. See on :16 for the fickleness of "all the people".

*Jeremiah 26:12 Then spoke Jeremiah to all the princes and to all the people saying, Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard-* This is picking up on their idea that anyone who spoke "against this city" must die because they were speaking, therefore, against Yahweh. But Jeremiah's point is that Yahweh had repeatedly spoken against His own city, and even His own house. They were reasoning as if Yahweh was but a tribal deity, who would always defend his own temple and city. They viewed the true God through the lens of how gods and religion was generally viewed; and that again is a challenge to our age.

*Jeremiah 26:13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh your God; and Yahweh will repent Him of the evil that He has pronounced against you-* Perhaps their "ways" refer to the well trodden ways and paths of thought within the mind, reflected in "doings". "Amend" is the word used of how Cain was bidden "do well", to amend his ways, and a sin offering was even provided for him (Gen. 4:7). Hereby Israel are set up as Cain, a parallel which the Lord (Jn. 8:44) and New Testament writers also perceive. Judah had "trimmed" or "ammended" their ways to seek relationships with the surrounding nations (Jer. 2:33 s.w.), willing to accept their gods and whatever cult obligations to them which were required. But they would not amend their ways for Yahweh. "Amend" is the word translated 'to do well to' in Jer. 7:23. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change

His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change. God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

*Jeremiah 26:14 But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes-* Having pleaded with Judah to repent, Jeremiah goes on to say: "But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes" (Jer. 26:13,14 RV). It's as if he doesn't mind if they kill him because they misunderstand him, his passionate concern, far over-riding any desire for his own preservation, was that they should repent.

*Jeremiah 26:15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants-* Even the pagans had a great fear of innocent blood being counted to them (Jonah 1:14), and this was also inculcated in the Jews by the Mosaic legislation (Dt. 19:10; 21:8). We see here how the sins of a minority can lead to cursing upon a majority; all the inhabitants would be cursed if the princes had decided to kill Jeremiah. The effects of Adam's sin were similar.

*For of a truth Yahweh has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears-* The word spoken was not just a general truth; Yahweh's word is a living word that is to come into the ears, intimately and personally, to every hearer. And the Bible to this day has the same effect.

*Jeremiah 26:16 Then the princes and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy of death; for he has spoken to us in the name of Yahweh our God-* We wonder why there was this *volte face*. The warning about the possibility of guilt for innocent blood (:15) presumably struck home. We conclude therefore that they did have a conscience, somewhere. And that conscience was piqued. We may assume that the majority of our audience are conscienceless. But this isn't the case. We are all made in the image of God, and thereby have a conscience. We note that "all the people" now sided with Jeremiah, when they had "all" sided with the false prophets in :11; and yet by :24 they were again seeking to put Jeremiah to death. This is one of many Biblical examples of how crowds are so fickle.

A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle. And quite simply, groups of people go against their own consciences, and then others, like Zedekiah, assume that they solidly hold positions which underneath they do not. Joseph's brothers were similar. We need to see through all this, and realize that whatever facade may appear, people are subconsciously more sensitive to our message than may appear. This can be verified by a simple experiment. Stand on a busy street corner passing out tracts advertising a free coffee; and observe the reactions of those who take them. And then start passing out tracts advertising a free Bible or Gospel meeting; the reactions are quite different, because conscience has been confronted. See on :22.

*Jeremiah 26:17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land and spoke to all the assembled people saying-* The "elders" are repeatedly presented as being against Yahweh and deeply culpable to judgment. And yet here we see that they had some kind of conscience, and awareness of historical and spiritual precedent. See on :16.

*Jeremiah 26:18 Micah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the*

*people of Judah, saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest-* This didn't happen at the hands of the Assyrians, but it was deferred, reapplied and rescheduled to AD70 and the last days. And so the Babylonian judgment likewise could have been rescheduled or even ameliorated- if even a minority had repented at the time. But it seems there was no response to Jeremiah's message at all.

*Jeremiah 26:19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Didn't he fear Yahweh, and entreat the favour of Yahweh-* "Entreat" is the word usually used for 'causing pain'. This shows the openness and sensitivity of God to human prayer and desire.

*And Yahweh relented of the disaster which He had pronounced against them? Thus should we commit great evil against our own souls-* When Hezekiah studied the words of Micah, "did he not fear the Lord, and besought the Lord, and the Lord repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against him" (Jer. 26:19). Those words of Mic. 3:12 had their fulfillment annulled or delayed thanks to Hezekiah's prayer and repentance. Likewise Jonah's prophecy that in 40 days Nineveh would be destroyed, unconditionally, was nullified by their repentance. And so the judgment of Jerusalem was likewise open to negotiation right up to the last moment.

Hezekiah obtained forgiveness and acceptance for those who kept the Passover "otherwise than it was written"- thanks to his prayer (2 Chron. 30:18). In Hezekiah's time, all Israel had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation (Jer. 26:13,19). All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed judgment, after the pattern of Phinehas (Jer. 5:1- or is this a reference to Messiah?).

*Jeremiah 26:20 There was also a man who prophesied in the name of Yahweh, Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath Jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah-* It's unclear whether this is another historical precedent quoted by the few elders of :17 in favour of not killing Jeremiah; or whether this was a counter precedent quoted by others at the court case of :10, justifying killing Jeremiah because another prophet had been killed for prophesying against Jerusalem. In any case, the fact that Uriah had been murdered for teaching what Jeremiah did remains as an indication of Jeremiah's bravery in so publically and forcefully teaching that same message.

*Jeremiah 26:21 and when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt-* As noted on :20, Jeremiah would have been aware of this, and he would have been careful to go into Egypt not because he feared, but because rather did he totally identify with God's apostate people. We too have situations like this, when we are forced to examine our motives; knowing that we can perform the same action from widely differing motives. And only we know our motives.

*Jeremiah 26:22 and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him, into Egypt-* This was significant effort. But Jehoiakim was so desperate to falsify God's word about him that he went to all this trouble to destroy the messenger. See on :16. But God noted it all, and the name and father's name of the man sent to do the dirty deed has been recorded all these centuries. He was likely the father in law of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 24:8).

*Jeremiah 26:23 and they fetched forth Uriah out of Egypt, and brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people-* These graves are only elsewhere referred to in 2 Kings 23:6, where we learn that Josiah in his reforms had desecrated these graves near Jerusalem because they were associated with idolatry. Perhaps they were the graves of those sacrificed to Baal (the victims likely included people other than children). This prophet was therefore treated as a sacrifice to Baal, and was likely killed therefore in loyalty to the Baal cult. The word of the false prophets and false gods had thus prevailed against the speaker of Yahweh's word.

*Jeremiah 26:24 But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah-* Ahikam was one of those who were

involved with finding and interpreting the "book of the law" that was discovered and was the basis for Josiah's reforms (2 Kings 22:12,14); his son Gedaliah appears to have been faithful and to also have cared for Jeremiah after Jerusalem fell (Jer. 40:6).

*That they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death-* We note that "all the people" sided with Jeremiah in :16, when they had "all" sided with the false prophets in :11; and yet now by :24 they were again seeking to put Jeremiah to death. This is one of many Biblical examples of how crowds are so fickle.

## Jeremiah Chapter 27

*Jeremiah 27:1 In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, came this word to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* We have just read in Jer. 26:20-24 that Jehoiakim had sought out and killed a prophet who taught precisely what Jeremiah did. This serves to highlight Jeremiah's bravery in so publically witnessing to the same truths. The LXX omits this verse, however; and it would seem from :3,12 that the section here refers not to Jehoiakim but to Zedekiah (cp. Jer. 26:1). Some had already gone into captivity (:16). Some manuscripts read "Zedekiah" here.

*Jeremiah 27:2 Thus says Yahweh to me: Make bonds and bars and put them on your neck-* Jeremiah personally was to experience the bonds and bars which he was telling others about. The "bonds" refer to the bonds connecting the two pieces of wood which formed the yoke. He was human and therefore in the position of everyone else. And this is to be the basis of our appeal to people likewise.

*Jeremiah 27:3 and send them to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the children of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah-* All this effort was to try to convert those nations; by humbling themselves beneath Babylon they were humbling themselves beneath Yahweh's word and will. It was His intention that the peoples around Judah should repent along with Judah. "The messengers" were the representatives of those nations invited by Zedekiah in a bid to make alliances with them and thus form a coalition to protect them from Babylon. This is described elsewhere as prostitution. These envoys were to be sent back with yokes they were invited to wear, symbolizing their subjection to Babylon rather than their opposition to Babylon. Edom joined in the destruction of Jerusalem along with the Babylonians, but Babylon later turned against Edom and destroyed her. Jeremiah's appeal at this point was not heard, and so we can imagine that the messengers refused to carry the yokes back to their rulers.

*Jeremiah 27:4 and give them a command to their masters saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, You shall tell your masters-* Yahweh had armies of Angels controlling and manipulating all human armies. The God of Israel was therefore in control of all the *eretz*; and Yahweh wanted them to accept that, which was tantamount to inviting them to accept Him as their God.

*Jeremiah 27:5 I have made the earth, the men and the animals that are on the surface of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to Me-* The nations on the *eretz* were no more than the animals, to whom God had also given their allotted portion. We note that there is no empirical reason given, no attempt at apologetics. This huge claim was simply made, and there was an internal credibility to it. And that is just the same today. God's amazing claims are of themselves the appeal and their credibility is within their own message, and is not strengthened by any appeal to other back up support. The "outstretched" arm of Yahweh is a term associated with God's redemption of Israel from captivity and bringing them into the *eretz*. This was to be His continued endpoint in view, the objective He had set in history, even if it were delayed, rescheduled and reapplied.

*Jeremiah 27:6 Now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the animals of the field also have I given him to serve him-* These animals may be simply parallel with the nations of :7; the same figure is in Ez. 31:6; Zeph. 2:14. Note how Nebuchadnezzar is presented as serving God; and the other nations serve him, and if they do this willingly, then by extension, they would be Yahweh's servants.

*Jeremiah 27:7 All the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come: and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bond servant-* I have repeatedly observed that God's prophecies are conditional; indeed there are many different scenarios of judgment presented in Jeremiah, because the human variables (particularly of repentance) were themselves not forced by God, but the results of genuine human freewill decisions. And so the nations serving Babylon for the next three generations of Babylonian rulers is another example of one possible scenario which didn't come about because various preconditions (perhaps invisible to us at this stage) weren't met. The 70 year period of servitude to Babylon (Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10) would certainly have to be understood not literally but as a round number. Nebuchadnezzar died B.C. 561, his son Evil-Merodach reigned only two years; then in B.C. 555 Laberosoarchod became king, but was deposed after nine months by a usurper from

another family, Nabonnedus or Nabunita, who ruled until B.C. 538, when Babylon fell. A literal "seventy years" from this point comes only to B.C. 555. See on :17.

*Jeremiah 27:8 It shall happen, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon-* The symbolism of the yoke is explained in Lam. 1:14, where it represents the yoke of sins. It is this which is lifted by the saving work of Yahweh in Messiah. To willingly place their necks under the yoke was to recognize they had sinned and deserved this. As noted on :6, Nebuchadnezzar is presented as serving God; and the other nations serve him, and if they do this willingly, then by extension, they would be Yahweh's servants. Again we perceive that God was seeking to convert even the Gentiles.

*That nation will I punish, says Yahweh, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the plague, until I have consumed them by his hand-* There is no particular evidence that supernatural famines and plagues were used to destroy nations who resisted Babylon; as noted on :7, we are dealing here with a series of potential scenarios.

*Jeremiah 27:9 But as for you, don't you listen to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon-* This is an appeal to the nations to not listen to their own prophets, but to Jeremiah as the only true prophet. We marvel at God's breadth of vision, initiative and wideness of hope to save- even these Gentile nations.

*Jeremiah 27:10 for they prophesy a lie to you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out, and you should perish-* "Remove you far" is a word used of Israel's exile at the hands of their invaders (Is. 6:12; 26:15). But this, like all judgments, was only a reflection of how they had gone far from God in their hearts (s.w. Jer. 2:5; Is. 29:13).

*Jeremiah 27:11 But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, that nation will I let remain in their own land, says Yahweh; and they shall till it, and dwell therein-* This prophecy was consciously disobeyed by the Jews who remained in the land after Jerusalem fell; they fled to Egypt. We note the same conditions were given to Judah as to the Gentile nations around them; clearly it was the Divine intention that they should all repent together. To serve the king of Babylon was effectively to serve Yahweh, seeing he was Yahweh's servant. "Till" and "serve" are the same Hebrew words. Serving their own land was to be service to Babylon. But they all wanted so much more, attracted as people are today by the promise of absolute freedom; when this is only possible through service to God in repentance.

*Jeremiah 27:12 I spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live-* According to the apocryphal book of Baruch, the exiles asked for 'deliverance'- but they redefined 'deliverance' as meaning being allowed to live prosperously in the land of their captivity (Baruch 1:12 cp. 2:14), rather than being delivered from Babylon and returning to Judah. In a way, the book of Esther shows how God heard this prayer. But the book of Esther therefore has a sad ending, with the Jews prosperous, loved and respected, and even further away from returning to the land. Indeed, Baruch 2:21 records them misquoting Jer. 27:12 about the need to obey the King of Babylon during their captivity, and understanding this as meaning they were to remain in Babylon! See on Jer. 29:10.

In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

*Jeremiah 27:13 Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?-* Zedekiah refused to respond, and yet he did not actually die at the hand of the king of Babylon as here implied- not by sword, nor famine nor plague.

He died of natural causes in prison (Jer. 52:11). Again, God's statements here are in terms of potential scenarios. Perhaps Zedekiah repented to some degree, and was as it were given credit for this. See on Jer. 21:7.

*Jeremiah 27:14 Don't listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you-* This was the classic message of false teachers- offering freedom, when in fact their message would make people slaves. Perhaps this was alluded to in 2 Pet. 2:19: "Promising them liberty, while they are in fact slaves to corruption. For of whom a person is overcome, of the same is he also brought into bondage".

*Jeremiah 27:15 For I have not sent them, says Yahweh, but they prophesy falsely in My name; that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you, and the prophets who prophesy to you-* The impression is given that the false prophets prophesied *so that* God could drive them out. God confirms people in whatever way they choose to go.

*Jeremiah 27:16 Also I spoke to the priests and to all this people saying, Thus says Yahweh: Don't listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you saying, Behold, the vessels of Yahweh's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you-* The priests preached and taught the word they were given by the prophets. It was therefore important for the priests to listen to the true words of Yahweh and not the false ones. Jeremiah was a priest, and was asking his own family to therefore listen to him rather than the false prophets. The temple vessels had been taken away so that the temple couldn't function properly. The idea was that the people would be drawn closer to God through realizing that He could be served without the ritual of the temple. And they would be driven to personal relationship with Him rather than depending upon any religious dimension.

*Jeremiah 27:17 Don't listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: why should this city become a desolation?-* The rhetorical questions are powerful; "Why die?" (:13). The city need not have "become a desolation"; and yet Jeremiah had prophesied 70 years of such "desolation" (s.w. Dan. 9:2). As explained on :7, there were various prophetic scenarios possible at this time. God was so sensitive to human repentance, and the degree of it, that He set up all these various possible scenarios in response to how far they would repent.

*Jeremiah 27:18 But if they be prophets, and if the word of Yahweh be with them, let them now make intercession to Yahweh of Armies, that the vessels which are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, don't go to Babylon-* See on :22. The more valuable vessels had already been taken in Jehoiakim and Jeconiah's time (:20). A true prophet would know that Yahweh's word was that Jerusalem and the temple would fall; and knowing this, and knowing Yahweh, the true prophets would have prayed that the word in their mouths would not come true. There is a gap between the Divine statement and its fulfillment, and within that historical gap there was time and opportunity for repentance to change the stated outcome. And a true prophet, like Jeremiah, would have perceived this.

*Jeremiah 27:19 For thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that are left in this city-* The laver remained after the deportations of :20. This was significant, in that it meant that a way of cleansing and forgiveness was still open, right up to the last moment.

*Jeremiah 27:20 which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon didn't take, when he carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem-* Perhaps he didn't take them because they were too heavy to easily transport. There is a parallel between the remaining vessels, and the remaining people. They were intended to see themselves as vessels in Yahweh's service.

*Jeremiah 27:21 yes, thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah and at Jerusalem-* The implication is that some of the temple vessels had been moved to the royal palace, which had been built of cedar in an attempt to imitate the temple. And the king had moved some of the vessels of Yahweh's house to his own house. This usage of the Divine for ourselves remains an abiding temptation, in essence, for all generations of God's people.

*Jeremiah 27:22 They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I visit them, says Yahweh; then will I bring them up, and restore them to this place-* The vessels of the temple were to be taken to Babylon- so says Jer. 27:22 plainly enough. *But* if the false prophets had repented and prayed, the vessels would not be taken to Babylon (Jer. 27:18). Prayer changes things, even the [apparently] expressly stated intention of God.

What Judah prayed for by the rivers of Babylon was indeed heard. There they had asked that God would “visit” them and “return” them (Ps. 80:14). The same two Hebrew words are to be found in Jer. 27:22, where we read that God would exile His people to Babylon and then “visit” them and make them “return”. We meet the same two words in Zeph. 2:7, where God would ‘visit and return’ the captivity of the remnant of Judah. But when God did “visit” His people, just as when He ‘visited’ His people in the gift of His Son, they didn’t want to ‘return’ or respond. Those who had desired ‘the day of the Lord’ at that time had been praying for it, when it was ‘to no end’ for them. And we have to ask ourselves whether we really mean our prayers for the Lord’s return. Jer. 27:22 predicted that God would “visit” His people and “bring them up”. Those very two words are found in the declaration of Cyrus as recorded in 2 Chron. 36:23: “God hath charged [s.w. “visited”] me to build him a house in Jerusalem... who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up [s.w. “bring them up”]”. The most powerful monarch in the Middle East made the humanly bizarre and inexplicable command to “go up” to the land. ‘Going up’ and ‘visiting’ are language associated with Angels. The people were being encouraged to follow the cherubim-Angel. But most of the people said ‘No that’s fine, we’ll give some money, but we’ll stay here thanks. We won’t be ‘going up’’. And in essence, we are *so* similar as a community.

## Jeremiah Chapter 28

*Jeremiah 28:1 It happened the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month-* Hebrew thought tends to divide periods into two, the beginning and the end. So the fourth year of his reign could still be understood as "the beginning".

*That Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was of Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of Yahweh, in the presence of the priests and of all the people saying-* The temple was Jeremiah's usual place of witness, as public as possible, standing there with the yoke upon his neck (:10); which was very brave, considering how unpopular and anti-establishment was his message.

*Jeremiah 28:2 Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon-* This is typical of false teaching. A true fact (that the yoke of Babylon would one day be broken) was presented in such a context and frame of reference that it was seriously false. The Babylonian yoke was to be lifted only when Judah repented; and they had not done so.

*Jeremiah 28:3 Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of Yahweh's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried to Babylon-* The specific detail, within exactly two years, is again typical of false prophets. They use detail as if to give credibility to their claims. But it is just an indication of how brazen they are in their falsity. As noted on :2, the characteristic of false teachers is that they twist God's true word; in this case, the promise of Jer. 27:22 that ultimately the temple vessels would be restored to Zion. See on :6.

*Jeremiah 28:4 and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, who went to Babylon, says Yahweh; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon-* Again (see on :2,3), this was a twist of God's true word. For Ezekiel, who was with those captives, had spoken of the possibility of their early restoration- if they repented. But like all people, they wanted the results of repentance and spirituality without the repentance and spiritual effort.

*Jeremiah 28:5 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of Yahweh-* Perhaps "Hananiah" was a name chosen by this false prophet, for the name means 'Yah has favoured', as if the promised time of grace and favour toward Zion had already come (alluding to the same words used in Is. 30:18,19; 33:2 etc.). It was one of the most continually attractive messages- the Kingdom without the path there, the crown without the cross.

*Jeremiah 28:6 even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: Yahweh do so; Yahweh perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring again the vessels of Yahweh's house, and all them of the captivity, from Babylon to this place-* As explained on :2-4, Hananiah was quoting true prophecies and yet saying they were to come about without any repentance. And Jeremiah recognizes this by saying that indeed these words will come true, but peace with God comes from relationship with Him and is not simply there for the wicked to grab.

*Jeremiah 28:7 Nevertheless hear you now this word that I speak in your ears, and in the ears of all the people-* This is the classic example of the need for God's words to be understood in context and not out of context.

*Jeremiah 28:8 The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of plague-* The idea seems to be that the bulk of the prophetic revelation had been of suffering and judgment; this far outweighed the material about "peace" (:7), and there were no prophecies about "peace" which did not foresee judgment and suffering as required before that "peace" was experienced. This is equivalent to Paul's comment that only through much suffering can we enter the Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

*Jeremiah 28:9 The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall happen, then shall the prophet be known, that Yahweh has truly sent him-* See on :8. This seems to imply that no true prophet prophesied only peace to Israel- there was always an exposure of sin and an appeal to repentance. That was part of their ministry. And it was directed at the people of God, for the most part- to us, the ecclesia. And it's indifference, lack of passion, which, it seems to me, is the besetting tragedy of our age. When did you last really shed tears? When were you moved, really wrenched in your gut, by the suffering of others, by the sin of this world, your own sin, your part in humanity's tragic rejection of God... when did you last *feel* for God in His pain, as He sees His beloved children and creation walk away from Him day after day, second after second? When did you last feel ecstatic joy, deep sadness... in this post-modern world of surface level emotion? It's in all this that the words of the prophets and their personal nature as people challenge us- and their spirit is to be the spirit of our testimony to Jesus in this world.

*Jeremiah 28:10 Then Hananiah the prophet took the bar from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it-* Hananiah realized that Jeremiah was preaching that the time of peace could only come by submitting to the yoke of Babylon in recognition of their sinfulness. It was only God who could lift that yoke, and Hananiah was claiming that he was acting on God's behalf. This truly was preaching peace with God when there could be no peace to the wicked.

*Jeremiah 28:11 Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people saying, Thus says Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two full years from off the neck of all the nations. The prophet Jeremiah went his way-* There are times when there is no point in arguing back against dogmatic liars and false teachers. Jeremiah would have gone his way to the jeers of the crowd; for Hananiah doubtless spoke with eloquence and calm dogmatism. It was only a specific call from Yahweh which meant that Jeremiah did, later, make a response. At the time, he simply walked away. Walking away is no sign that we have lost the argument; we are not called upon to argue back. God's truth will of itself be justified.

*Jeremiah 28:12 Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the bar from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah saying-* See on :11. It was God's preference to allow the people to weigh up the two alternative 'words from Yahweh' which they had heard.

*Jeremiah 28:13 Go, and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh: You have broken the bars of wood; but you have made in their place bars of iron-* To be placed under a yoke of iron was the punishment for breaking the old covenant (Dt. 28:48). Suddenly the significance of Jeremiah's *wooden* yoke became apparent; they could have chosen a far ameliorated version of judgment, if they had recognized their sins. But that possibility was now withdrawn. God likewise works with people today. The implication of the grammar here is that the iron yoke had been made by Hananiah. By refusing the ties that bind, they become heavier. Man's search for ultimate freedom is in vain, unless we accept the servitude God offers.

*Jeremiah 28:14 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the animals of the field also-* The reference to the animals may simply be an expansion of the idea of the nations having been given to him. Or perhaps there was a sense in which even the natural creation recognized that they had a new human master. This was to be the extent of God's communication of this truth. We note that the iron rather than the wooden yoke was placed upon the Gentile nations because of Hananiah's awful sin and the way Judah eagerly believed him (:13). If they had rejected him and accepted Jeremiah's message, then the yoke of Babylon upon the nations would have been lighter; and had they accepted Nebuchadnezzar as being Yahweh's servant and thereby willingly served Him through serving Babylon, it would have been broken altogether. So much was potentially possible for the Gentiles had Judah repented.

*Jeremiah 28:15 Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah: Yahweh has not sent you; but you make this people to trust in a lie-* The invitation to Hananiah to "hear..." was because this was an appeal for his repentance. The planned death of Hananiah could have not happened, had he repented. He didn't, and the people willingly believed his lies, because it was a message they were predisposed to accept. This is why false teaching is listened to. It is a question of moral rather than intellectual failure.

*Jeremiah 28:16 Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will send you away from off the surface of the land: this year you shall die, because you have spoken rebellion against Yahweh-* He had a year to repent, but he didn't, and the fact he died only two months later suggests he hardened himself in his false message (:17). To refuse the yoke of Babylon was rebellion against Yahweh. For Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, and so accepting bondage to him was accepting servitude to Yahweh. The allusion is to Dt. 13:5, where the false prophet who spoke rebellion against Yahweh was to be killed (s.w.), because he was bringing the people back into bondage. This is the great paradox- that refusal of the ties that bind to God is a return to bondage. And accepting His bondage is freedom.

*Jeremiah 28:17 So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month-* He died two *months* later (:1), perhaps alluding to his claim that the yoke would be broken within two *years*.

## Jeremiah Chapter 29

*Jeremiah 29:1 Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the residue of the elders of the captivity, and to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon-* This prophecy is in line with that of the good and bad figs of Jer. 24. The good figs were to be those who had first gone into captivity, who were to repent and then return; the bad figs referred to Zedekiah and his courtiers, and he is referred to as this in :17. But as noted on Jer. 24, that prophecy had only potential fulfillment and did not come true as potentially possible. That must be remembered in interpreting what follows here.

*Jeremiah 29:2 (after that Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem)-* These craftsmen may have been deported because they had helped build defences against the Babylonians. But the words are also used for the formers of idols; perhaps they were taken away so that those who remained would have less chance of committing idolatry and would repent.

*Jeremiah 29:3 by the hand of Elasah the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), saying-* Zedekiah was Babylon's puppet king and so there was regular sending of messengers between the two cities.

*Jeremiah 29:4 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, to all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon-* The reminder was that the carrying into captivity had been done by God; the Babylonians were His servants, their armies controlled by Yahweh of armies. They were to realize this, and serve Babylon as if serving Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 29:5 Build houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat their fruit-* This was a direct quotation from Is. 65:21 and Am. 9:14 about the situation in the Kingdom of God. Whilst waiting for the restoration of that Kingdom, they were to live the kingdom life as far as possible in exile; just as we are to live the life of the Kingdom, the eternal life, in this life. See on Jer. 30:18.

*Jeremiah 29:6 Take wives, and father sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and don't be diminished-* This would be stating the obvious unless we understand it as meaning that the Jews were being encouraged to intermarry with the people of Babylon. This was a special dispensation for a special occasion; because as noted on :7, the Divine intention was that Babylon should repent, and along with repentant Judah become part of a restored Kingdom of God on earth based in Zion.

*Jeremiah 29:7 Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace-* "Peace" is often peace with God. Babylon could have repented; see on :6 and Jer. 51:8,9. Jer. 33:6; 43:12 can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah. From Zion, peace would be spoken to the Gentiles (Zech. 9:10). They were to pray for "peace" upon Babylon in the sense of peace with God; but either they didn't pray for this, returning to their nationalism and racial elitism; or Babylon didn't want it. Hence the predictions of the destruction of Babylon in later Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 29:8 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Don't let your prophets who are in the midst of you, and your diviners, deceive you; neither listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed-* The prophets were "in the midst" of Jerusalem, in Zion itself. The common people caused the false prophets to dream their dreams; the expectations and hopes of the masses were perceived by the false prophets, and they perhaps genuinely dreamed what the people wanted; but those dreams were not of God but just the usual outcome of subconscious psychological forces in the Freudian sense.

*Jeremiah 29:9 For they prophesy falsely to you in My name: I have not sent them, says Yahweh-* As explained on :8,

it is one thing to have a dream, as the normal outcome of unconscious psychological forces; but it is quite another to falsely claim that this is from God. It is a playing God in the worst way.

*Jeremiah 29:10 For thus says Yahweh, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you and perform My word of grace towards you, in causing you to return to this place-* The 70 year period of Jer. 25:11,12 didn't come true exactly. The 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. See on :32 and Jer. 27:7; 31:22. That period was to involve the surrounding nations being subject to Babylon for that period. It was a potential, one of many possible scenarios. The nations around Judah didn't serve Babylon for 70 years. If the exiles had repented as intended, and had brought the other nations to accept Yahweh, then this may have been the scenario. But that didn't happen, and so as explained on Jer. 25:12, the period was recalculated and reinterpreted. And as noted on Jer. 10:18, the land was not completely desolate for the 70 year period. A 70 year period of desolation for Tyre in Is. 23:17 likewise didn't have a literal fulfillment because various unstated preconditions weren't met. From BC606, the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 25:1), to the fall of Babylon in BC539, is 67 years, not 70. So there was some flexibility in the time period. Yet the same 70 year period is mentioned here in Jer. 29:10 in a prophecy apparently given 11 years later than that of Jer. 25:12.

So the 70 years of Babylon's mastery and Judah's captivity were not strictly fulfilled to the letter. From the fall of Nineveh (612) to the fall of Babylon (539) was 73 years; or from Nebuchadnezzar's accession (605) to Babylon's fall (539) was 66 years (Dates taken from John Bright, *Jeremiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) p. 209). Was there a degree to which the period was prolonged or decreased, due to unstated variables- perhaps prayer, Judah's repentance, Babylon's repentance...?

Closer study reveals the variableness of outworking of the time periods. Jer. 25:11,12 and Jer. 29:10 speak of a 70 year period of Babylonian rule over Judah, beginning with the invasion of BC597. But Babylon only ruled over Judah for 49 years, before Babylon fell to the Persians. This would connect with the way that Zech. 4:3 speaks of 7 menorah candlesticks each with 7 lamps, making 49 lamps. 49 is the cycle of 7 Sabbath years that culminated in the jubilee year, and the jubilee year, the proclamation of liberty to the land (Lev. 25:8-12; 27:7-24) is a figure used so often in Isaiah to describe the freedom of Judah once released from Babylon. Lev. 26:34,43 speak of the land enjoying her Sabbaths whilst Israel were in exile for their sins- i.e. for 49 years. So it seems that there could have been some restoration after 49 years- but it didn't happen. But Dan. 9:2 and 2 Chron. 36:21 seem to reinterpret those 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecies as speaking of a 70 year period during which Jerusalem and the temple would be desolate. And yet there again, Ezekiel was asked to prophecy that Judah would suffer for their sins for 40 years (Ez. 4:6). Perhaps something could've happened after 40 years... Perhaps some restoration could have happened to the ten tribes after 390 years (Ez. 4:5), although there's no sign it ever did. And then, the starting point of the 70 or 40 years was somewhat flexible- for Ez. 22:3,4 records Ezekiel's prophecy that the desolation of Jerusalem by the Babylonians [the starting point of the time periods] was actually being hastened, brought forward, by the terrible behaviour of the Jews living there after the initial Babylon invasion of the land. In fact, if a person had been found who would have powerfully interceded for Jerusalem, 'stood in the gap' (Ez. 22:30), God wouldn't have destroyed Jerusalem - "that I should not destroy it" is an allusion to Abraham interceding for Sodom in Gen. 18:28. There were simply so many possible scenarios!

Baruch 6:2 is perhaps the most serious example of misquoting and willfully misunderstanding God's word. Here, Baruch [as Jeremiah's scribe] changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: "When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back". The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. "The time" referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah- but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God's word- the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God's law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh. See on Jer. 27:12.

*Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says Yahweh, thoughts of peace, and not of evil-* The same words are found in Jer. 18:8; God will indeed think evil towards His people if they do not repent; but He says now that He thinks not evil but peace. This could be a reflection of His desperate hope and assumption that they would repent; or it could simply be that the pole of His desire for peace with men is finally stronger than His legitimate need to bring the evil of judgment upon them.

*To give you hope and a future-* God gave Judah in captivity "hope in your latter end" (RV)- a hope of restoration at

the end of the 70 years. Yet they preferred the Babylon life, and rejected this hope. "Ye shall seek me...and I will be found of you" (Jer. 29:14) then becomes a conditional statement- then, *if* they sought the Lord, they would have been found of Him.

Stand and watch a stream of people passing along a busy street. The eager young woman, the tired, worried business man, the young father, the old, sick man, the middle aged woman with the blank eyes... the greatest tragedy to me is not so much death, that one day relatively soon these faces will all be face down or face up in the dust of death, but rather... the tragedy is surely that they are living life without purpose. But for us, we recognize that God has a plan for us- and that plan is positive, to do us good and not harm in our latter end. Nothing is insignificant in our lives. Even the smallest incidents have significance for our character development. No meeting with anyone is a chance; we have the power of eternal life in our clumsy hands, through knowing the Gospel of life. Whoever we meet we are surely intended to meet, and extend the hope of life to them. Having a sense of purpose simplifies life. There are less choices; we don't over-extend ourselves trying to do too much, with all the stress and conflict which this results in. It is meaningless work rather than overwork that wears us down and robs us of our joy.

*Jeremiah 29:12 You shall call on Me, and you shall go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you-* As explained on :11, God is assuming Israel's repentance. Here we have His fantasy, if you like, of God for Israel. They would call upon Him and want to "go and pray to Me", in Jerusalem; and He would confirm that desire by miraculously returning them to Zion. But they didn't repent. And yet He still caused Cyrus to give the decree encouraging them to return- such was His desire to as it were force through His saving purpose with His people. That most of them didn't respond even to that is terrible, just as it is today.

*Jeremiah 29:13 You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart-* Repentance and seeking God are related; thus Israel's restoration came when they were seeking God and (i.e.) repented (Jer. 29:12-14). However, there is good reason to think that Israel at this time were still spiritually weak; some of them had a *desire* to seek righteousness, and God accepted this. The connection between repentance and seeking God means that to withdraw fellowship from someone for not repenting enough, is to disfellowship them for not seeking God enough. The implication is that the rest of us have sought God enough- and therefore found Him. This is pure self-righteousness. In conclusion, God wants us to *be seeking* Him, but this *seeking* God does not imply *complete* repentance and forsaking of sin. There seems no reason to think that we should break fellowship with someone for not seeking God *enough*, if we admit that they are not seeking *evil*.

The LXX suggests that the praying and seeking was perhaps a condition of fulfillment: "And do ye pray to me, and I will hearken...and do ye earnestly seek me, and ye shall find me". But the next verses go on to say that because they had false prophets in Babylon, the wrath of God was against them all, and even those in the land would suffer because of them. And further (29:23-26), they committed adultery and vied for leadership amongst themselves. Judah did return, but evidently they didn't seek Yahweh with all their hearts beforehand. And thus they were not fully found of Him, and He did not therefore fully turn away their captivity. Indeed, by choosing to remain in Babylon, they themselves disallowed this turning away of their captivity.

*Jeremiah 29:14 I will be found by you, says Yahweh, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have driven you, says Yahweh; and I will bring you again to the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive-* As explained on :11,12, God is assuming Israel's repentance. Here we have His fantasy, if you like, of God for Israel. They would call upon Him and want to "go and pray to Me", in Jerusalem (:12); and He would confirm that desire by miraculously returning them to Zion. God gave Judah in captivity "hope in your latter end" (:11 RV)- a hope of restoration at the end of the 70 years. Yet they preferred the Babylon life, and rejected this hope. "Ye shall seek me...and I will be found of you" (Jer. 29:14) then becomes a conditional statement- then, *if* they sought the Lord, they would have been found of Him.

*Jeremiah 29:15 Because you have said, Yahweh has raised us up prophets in Babylon-* Just as the faith of others can lead to forgiveness and salvation of third parties in some cases (see on Mk. 2:5), so the opposite can be the case. Because the exiles in Babylon chose to believe their false prophets and disbelieve Ezekiel who was there with them, therefore the "bad figs" would indeed be bad figs; those left in Judah were to receive judgment. Whereas in the Divine economy, those "bad figs" could have been saved by the repentance of the exiles who were already in

Babylon. A lot depended upon that group, as Ezekiel often reminds them. See on :22.

*Jeremiah 29:16 thus says Yahweh concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who haven't gone forth with you into captivity-* As explained on :15, although these men were evil, God was prepared to avert or ameliorate their judgment for the sake of the spirituality and repentance of the exiles already in Babylon.

*Jeremiah 29:17 thus says Yahweh of Armies; Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that can't be eaten, they are so bad-* See on :1. As explained on :15, the "vile figs" were indeed "vile", but their judgment could have been averted or ameliorated for the sake of the spirituality and repentance of the exiles already in Babylon.

*Jeremiah 29:18 I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of horror, and an astonishment-* This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

*And a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations where I have driven them-* The hissing and mocking was because Jerusalem had been praised in David's psalms (e.g. Ps. 48:2; 50:2) as the joy of the whole earth and perfect in beauty (Lam. 2:15). Those Psalms of David were well known; for David after the Bathsheba incident had vowed to preach the good news of Yahweh's grace to the entire world. He had done so through his Psalms. His music ministry had been successful; the nations knew the songs about Zion being the joy of the whole earth and the perfection of beauty. And so they mocked it as it lay in ruins.

*Jeremiah 29:19 because they have not listened to My words, says Yahweh, with which I sent to them My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but you would not hear, says Yahweh-* Those left in Jerusalem were indeed "vile figs" and had refused the prophetic word of Jeremiah and other true prophets. But they could have been forgiven for that for the sake of the repentance of the exiles in Babylon. Likewise the paralyzed man of Mk. 2:5 had his sins forgiven for the sake of the friends. Just as happened when Job prayed for his friends.

*Jeremiah 29:20 Hear therefore the word of Yahweh, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon-* As noted on :1, this prophecy is addressing the same two groups as in Jer. 24; the captives were intended to repent and become the good figs, whereas Zedekiah and his courtiers who remained in Jerusalem would become the bad figs (Jer. 29:17). But that prophecy was only potentially true. Because now in Jer. 29:21-32 Jeremiah warns the exiles, those who were supposed to become good figs, that they were tolerating false prophets and following them.

*Jeremiah 29:21 Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall kill them before your eyes-* The "lie" was that of the serpent, "you will not really die", you have not sinned and will not sin, it is Yahweh who is being unreasonable with you... These false prophets were presumably targeted by Nebuchadnezzar because they predicted his overthrow and the restoration of the Jewish kingdom. But that was precisely the message of Jeremiah; but he was treated well by the Babylonians, because he saw these things as dependent upon Jewish servitude to Nebuchadnezzar, who he presented as a servant of Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 29:22 and of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captives of Judah who are in Babylon saying, Yahweh make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire-* Again we see the fickleness of God's people when they act *en masse*. They eagerly believed these men (:15), and then cursed them

when they were burnt to death in the fiery furnace. Daniel's faithful friends had been saved out of that same furnace; perhaps they had blasphemously claimed to be equal to them, and certain of preservation likewise.

*Jeremiah 29:23 because they have worked folly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I didn't command them; and I am He who knows, and am witness, says Yahweh-* The uninspired apocryphal book of Susanna claims that two false prophets who were her neighbours tried to rape her in a park in Babylon, but she resisted them. She complained of their behaviour, but they falsely accused her and she was condemned to death- to be saved by the intervention of Daniel the prophet, who had the two rapists condemned to death. Whether this is true or not can never be known, but it would slot in at this point with the inspired account. And again we see that false teaching is nearly always associated with immorality, often in the sexual sense- rather than being a genuine intellectual misunderstanding.

*Jeremiah 29:24 Concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak saying-* "Nehelamite" is literally a dreamer, a false prophet.

*Jeremiah 29:25 Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, Because you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests saying-* He wrote probably in the name of God; but God knew that he wrote only in his own name. Just as the prophets had their own dreams, but played God by claiming they were speaking in God's Name. This confusion between our name and God's Name is just as tempting today; e.g. the pastor who claims he has had a word from the Lord which requires his congregation to buy him an expensive luxury item.

*Jeremiah 29:26 Yahweh has made you priest in the place of Jehoiada the priest, that there may be officers in the house of Yahweh, for every man who is mad, and makes himself a prophet, that you should put him in the stocks and in shackles-* If Zephaniah son of Maaseiah (:25) was the brother of the false prophet in Babylon, Zedekiah son of Maaseiah (:21), then the political intrigue and nepotism is clear. This was of men and not God. The supposed command from Yahweh to put false prophets who were mad into the stocks runs quite contrary to the spirit of the law of Moses. Death was the punishment for false prophets, not public mockery. And mental instability was never a cause for punishment under Yahweh's law; that is the stuff of pure paganism. We note that both the Lord and Paul were likewise accused of madness, just as we too are viewed as "crazy" and "fools" by secular society.

*Jeremiah 29:27 Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who makes himself a prophet to you-* Jeremiah accused the false prophets likewise of making themselves prophets. Clearly one side was right and the other wrong. The whole thing was set up like this so that the spiritually minded would intuitively perceive where the truth was.

*Jeremiah 29:28 because he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, The captivity is long: build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat their fruit?-* By implication, the message therefore of the false prophets was that the captivity would be short, and perhaps instead of submitting to Babylon as a sign of their repentance and settling in there, the false prophets were teaching rebellion against Babylon.

*Jeremiah 29:29 Zephaniah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet-* This was all in public, at the temple, in some kind of public trial.

*Jeremiah 29:30 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah, saying-* This was presumably at the same time as the public trial (:29). Or maybe Jeremiah walked away with nothing more to say, leaving the people to perceive intuitively where truth lay. And then Yahweh spoke.

*Jeremiah 29:31 Send to all them of the captivity saying, Thus says Yahweh concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I didn't send him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie-* Causing to trust in a lie was the essence of the sin in Eden; the events there are the prototype of all subsequent human failure. The accusation that they had willingly trusted in lies is found throughout Jeremiah (s.w. Jer. 7:4,8; 13:25; 28:15).

The people willingly believed his lies, because it was a message they were predisposed to accept. This is why false teaching is listened to. It is a question of moral rather than intellectual failure.

*Jeremiah 29:32 therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he see the good that I will do to My people, says Yahweh, because he has spoken rebellion against Yahweh-* The implication is that that generation would "see the good that I will do to My people"; but Shemaiah would die prematurely and would not see it. This is further evidence that the idea of 70 years captivity was not the only possible prophetic scenario at the time; see on :10.

## Jeremiah Chapter 30

*Jeremiah 30:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying-* Previously in Jeremiah there has been the implication that right up to the last minute, the fall of Jerusalem and exile was avoidable by repentance. Now in Jer. 30-34 we have the tacit assumption that this will indeed happen, but the focus is upon the future restoration from that calamity, and the way it was designed to elicit repentance.

*Jeremiah 30:2 Thus speaks Yahweh, the God of Israel saying, Write all the words that I have spoken to you in a book-* This may refer specifically to Jer. 30-34, the prophecies of the restoration which were to be the spiritual handbook for the exiles, in that their experiences were to be understood in this context as leading them to repentance.

*Jeremiah 30:3 For, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will turn again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, says Yahweh; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it-* Time and again, Jeremiah had prophesied how Yahweh would *bring again* His people and the vessels of the temple back to the land (Jer. 30:3,18; 31:23); and this all had a fulfillment in the return from captivity under Ezra and Nehemiah. It was then that in some sense Yahweh 'brought again Zion' (Is. 52:8). The very same word used by Joel [translated "bring again"] is to be found in the references to Judah's return at the restoration (Ezra 2:1; 6:21; Neh. 7:6; 8:17). The same word is to be found in Ezekiel 38:8 and 39:27, where again, the invasion is to happen once Judah had been 'brought again' from captivity. Judah returned, and yet they didn't rebuild the temple as they were commanded. Therefore the invasion didn't come, and therefore the Kingdom wasn't then established. Their return from exile at what is called 'the restoration' wasn't associated with a return to God in repentance; and so these prophecies have been reapplied and rescheduled, to the repentance of a new, spiritual Israel under the new covenant in Jesus Christ; and to the final repentance and return of God's natural people.

*Jeremiah 30:4 These are the words that Yahweh spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah-* It was God's intention that the experience of repentance and receipt of grace would lead to both Judah and the ten tribe Israel being united, and returning as united to Zion. This didn't happen, but the unity of the new Israel is predicated upon these experiences (and not simply upon a common theology).

*Jeremiah 30:5 For thus says Yahweh: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace-* It was God's intention to bring peace at that time, peace with Him through repentance (see on Jer. 29:11), but instead their lack of repentance left them in chronic fear and trembling at the prospect of destruction by Babylon. They should have trembled (s.w.) at God's word in repentance (Ezra 9:4; 10:3; Is. 66:2,5); but they now trembled at the prospect of condemnation. Whichever way, man comes to trembling before his God. And we are to tremble and repent, rather than trembling in the condemnation of the last day.

*Jeremiah 30:6 Ask now, and see whether a man does travail with child: why do I see every man with his hands on his waist, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?-* The psychological collapse of the condemned is a major theme of the prophecies of judgment. But even in the figure of men becoming like travailing women, there is within the metaphor the hope of new birth. GNB "Can a man give birth to a child?" suggests that what might seem impossible would in fact be brought about by God's grace. "Waist" is GNB "stomach".

*Jeremiah 30:7 Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it-* The Divine intention was that the Babylonian invasion and destruction of Jerusalem was to be unprecedented. But Dan. 12:1 reapplies this language to the last days, when Jacob's final time of trouble will be ended by the resurrection from the dead at the coming of "Michael", representing the Lord Jesus. The planned potential didn't happen at the time of Babylon, but these words will come to their final term in the last days. Jacob's previous 'times of trouble' had all been at the hands of their neighbouring enemies (Jud. 10:14; Neh. 9:27; Jer. 14:8) and Esau, and so it shall be in the final time of trouble for Jacob. The salvation of Jacob from the time of trouble is however defined in Jer. 15:11 as being through the salvation of a remnant of them.

*Jeremiah 30:8 It shall come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will break his yoke from off your neck, and will burst your bonds; and strangers shall no more make him their bond servant-* The pure grace of God's dealings with Jacob is brought out in how Jer. 30:7,8 prophecies that in the time of Jacob's trouble, "I will break his [the invader's] yoke from off thy neck. This was the promise given to Esau- and one could say that Jacob having got all he did, at least Esau should be allowed to have the little promise given to him. But now even this is given to Jacob- at the time of his 'trouble, his final down treading for centuries of disobedience. Judah had "broken the yoke and burst the bonds" of their covenant relationship with God (Jer. 5:5), but He by grace had broken the yoke and bonds of those who enslaved them (Jer. 2:20; 30:8).

*Jeremiah 30:9 But they shall serve Yahweh their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up to them-* The yoke of servitude to Babylon was to be replaced by the lighter yoke of servitude to Yahweh and "David", a Messianic ruler in the line of David. This could have been Zerubbabel, but he failed; and so clearly the prophecy has final fulfillment in the Lord Jesus, who was "raised up" from the dead by Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 30:10 Therefore don't you be afraid, O Jacob my servant, says Yahweh; neither be dismayed, Israel-* Isaiah's restoration prophecies contained not only many clear commands to *not fear* at the time of the restoration (Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4), but also a clear statement that if they were truly the re-established Kingdom, they would not fear: "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest [s.w. Zechariah 7:14 re. how Judah was 'tossed around' by the 70 years captivity] I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires... and all thy borders of pleasant stones. And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for *thou shalt not fear*: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee... and all thy children shall be taught of the LORD" (Is. 54:11-14). The adversaries to the rebuilding *did* make the returned exiles afraid: "For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands" (Neh. 6:9). Likewise Ezra 3:3: "And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries". Nehemiah exhorted the people *not* to be afraid perhaps on the basis of Jeremiah's words (Neh. 4:14). Their fear and problem-oriented view of life stopped the Kingdom bursting forth into their experience. That fear was rooted in an obsessive self-interest that eclipsed a true faith in that which is greater and larger than us as individuals. And so it can be with us.

*For, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid-* This salvation from far off must be understood in the context of how God says that He was potentially near to Judah, but they had chosen to keep Him "far off" (s.w.) in their hearts; see on Jer. 12:2;23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

*Jeremiah 30:11 For I am with you, says Yahweh, to save you-* This alludes to Isaiah's "Emmanuel" prophecy of the Messiah who would be "God with us". 'Yah's salvation' is Yehoshua, Jesus.

*For I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you, but I will not make a full end of you-* Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God. This change by God was in response to Jeremiah's prayer of Jer. 10:24, where the same words are used; Jeremiah as representative of the people asked not to be corrected to the point of destruction, but to be corrected "in measure". See on :19.

*But I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished-* The frequent appeals for Judah to be "instructed" use the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). That correction / punishment was to be "in measure", the same phrase is used by Jeremiah as Judah's representative when he asked to be corrected "with justice / judgment" (Jer. 10:18). His personal reformation was to be that of Judah; see on :13. The paradox is that Judah deserved total destruction, as Jeremiah and other prophets do state at times; and yet the "just" judgment was that which resulted in reformation and not total destruction. That justice involved them not being left "unpunished"; the guilty cannot be "cleared" (s.w.).

"unpunished"; Ex. 34:7; Nah. 1:3). That is a fundamental part of God's character. The problem was that the Jews of Jeremiah's time considered themselves "innocent" (Jer. 2:35 s.w. "unpunished"). They had to be convicted both of their sin and of God's grace, in punishing / correcting them less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13).

*Jeremiah 30:12 For thus says Yahweh, Your hurt is incurable, and your wound grievous-* But Yahweh healed the incurable (Jer. 30:17). This is the Bible paradox of God's love of Israel and desire for their redemption. As noted on :11, they deserved total destruction, but God's wonderful way with Israel was to punish them less than their sins deserved and yet do so with justice.

*Jeremiah 30:13 There is none to plead your cause, that you may be bound up: you have no healing medicines-* The false prophets had failed to heal them by offering them "peace" without repentance (s.w. Jer. 6:14; 8:11). As noted on :11, Jeremiah was Judah's representative, and he too had been healed when there was no healing possible apart from the Divine (Jer. 17:14 s.w.). Jeremiah in depression seems to have lost faith in the healing promised in Jer. 30:13, for he laments amongst the ruins of Jerusalem that Zion is without a healer (Lam. 2:13).

*Jeremiah 30:14 All your lovers have forgotten you; they don't seek you-* The lovers were the surrounding nations whom she had trusted in; they were destroyed by Babylon or sided with Babylon.

*For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased-* God was the healer of the wound as well as the wounder (:15). Let us not forget His hurt and experience of having been wounded. In Jer. 6:7, God laments that the continual bubbling forth of their wickedness, as from a perpetual fountain, was matched in His continual woundedness. That God can be wounded by our behaviour... is a stunning concept. This reveals the extent to which God has sensitized Himself toward man, when we are but ants before Him, the King of the cosmos. Yet the same word is used here of the deep wounding of God's people by the invaders (Jer. 14:17; 30:14); but God felt that Himself even before they did.

*Jeremiah 30:15 Why do you cry for your hurt? Your pain is incurable: for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased, I have done these things to you-* The wounder was God, who was Himself wounded in their hurt, and yet He was also their healer. See on :14. Their wound was incurable by any apart from Him.

*Jeremiah 30:16 Therefore all those who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, each one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who despoil you shall be a spoil, and all who prey on you will I give for a prey-* God's love for Israel is such that even in their guilt He still avenges them. The structure of the book of Revelation reflects the principles of this verse; the seals speak of the judgments on Israel in the last days, but they are very similar to the later series of judgments, which are upon her latter day desolators. "Devour" means to consume to destruction; the paradox is that Israel were devoured but survived by grace, just as they were cured of an incurable wound. The adversaries of Judah didn't all go into exile at the time of Jeremiah; this is another indication that these prophecies of the restoration are to be reapplied and rescheduled to the last days.

*Jeremiah 30:17 For I will restore health to you, and I will heal you of your wounds, says Yahweh-* To be cured of an incurable wound was to be achieved only by God's grace. Likewise the broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently (Jer. 19:11). But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

*Because they have called you an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeks after-* God is very sensitive to the words said about His people, even when they are suffering for their sins. His patience and hurt with all the countless words of anti-Jewish mockery over the centuries... is the more amazing. None of Zion's one time lovers sought her (:14). But God did. And His desperate hope was that they would seek Him, and He would as it were meet them in joy. God is in search of man, of Israel in particular; our 'search for the truth' or 'for God' is not made in limbo, beneath the apparent silence of the steely skies. God is in search of man too. "And going out to find Him, I met Him coming toward me", in the words of a Yiddish poem. They were indeed outcasts, thrust away ones, because the false

prophets had thrust them away from Yahweh (Dt. 13:10 s.w.), and God had confirmed this by 'casting them out' as outcast from Him (s.w. Jer. 8:3; 29:18). But still God was and is so deeply sensitive to that being negatively commented upon.

*Jeremiah 30:18 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have compassion on his dwelling places-* Although Judah were encouraged to build houses in Babylon (Jer. 29:5), they were to perceive them as mere "tents" compared to their permanent dwelling place, which was back in the cities of Israel. And this is how we ought to perceive our homes, even if we lived in the house we were born in all our days. They are but tents compared to the ultimate permanence of our place in God's Kingdom.

*And the city shall be built again on its own hill, and the palace shall be inhabited in its own former way-* Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies: "the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall be where it used to be". And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to be built within the city of Jerusalem. This would all point towards the temple commanded in Ez. 40-48 being smaller than the huge edifice envisioned by Henry Sulley. See on Ez. 45:1.

*Jeremiah 30:19 Out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small-* See on :11. "Few" is literally "brought to nothing". Judah were not literally 'brought to nothing'. This was in response to Jeremiah's prayer in Jer. 10:24- to correct / punish [s.w.] Judah, but not bring them to nothing. The promise of multiplication obviously alludes to the promises to Abraham; these were to be the basis of the new covenant which Judah were to enter, seeing that they had broken the old covenant.

*Jeremiah 30:20 Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress them-* The emphasis is upon restoration, "as before". The future kingdom of God will be a reestablishment of the Kingdom of God as it was in the form of Israel. The congregation "established before Me" uses the language of the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:16,26. The seed of David would be "before Me" for ever; the promises to David could have been fulfilled at Jeremiah's time, but they were not. And so the restoration will come to its final term in the last days through the Lord Jesus, the great seed of David.

*Jeremiah 30:21 Their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from their midst; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to Me-* When Judah returned, they could have entered into the new covenant, featuring "nobles [an intensive plural, meaning 'the great noble']... and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them" (Jer. 30:21). He would be a Jew, not a Gentile, fulfilling the promises to David (see on :20). Zerubbabel the Governor could have fulfilled this; but he flunked out. Yet God lifted up his spirit a second time (Hag. 1:14 cp. (Hag. 1:14 cp. Ezra 1:5); he was given a second chance, such was God's enthusiasm that he should achieve what was potentially possible for him. But again, he failed. He saw the glory of Babylon as more attractive than the hard work required to bring about Yahweh's eternal glory in Zion. It is noteworthy how God worked through this man's failures, and desired to give him (and all Israel) further opportunities. See on Jer. 23:5.

This leader who would come close to God in mediation would be willing to give his life to enable this. This must be connected with how Is. 53, describing Messiah's death, is actually in a restoration context (beginning in Is. 52). Could it not be that a Messiah figure could have arisen and died a sacrificial death to bring his people to God? Daniel 9 likewise associates the rebuilding of Zion with the death of "Messiah the prince" to reconcile Israel to God- perhaps potentially possible within a literal 70 week period from Cyrus' decree?

*For who is he who has had boldness to approach to Me? says Yahweh-* AV "who is this that engaged his heart to approach...". The Hebrew is literally 'who has braided / intermixed his heart'. David was a man after God's own heart, and his greater son was likewise to have a heart braided with that of God. It was the Lord Jesus, the man with the heart of God, who alone is able to fully approach unto God.

*Jeremiah 30:22 You shall be My people, and I will be your God-* Again this refers to the promises to Abraham; Judah would truly be the promised seed. The new covenant they would accept would be based upon the promises to Abraham.

*Jeremiah 30:23 Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth, a sweeping storm: it shall burst on the head of the wicked-* This threat of terrible judgment is juxtaposed purposefully next to the language of the restoration. The wrath of God is indeed the prelude to the love of God. This is the same idea as the cherubim storm being used by Ezekiel to represent how the armies of Babylon had already "gone forth" and were about to burst over the wicked in Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 30:24 The fierce anger of Yahweh will not return, until He has executed, and until He has performed the intentions of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it-* There is a gap between God's statements and their execution, and in that gap there can be human repentance which means that the initial intentions or statements of God do not come about. But there had been no take up of that opportunity, and so the intents of God's heart concerning judgment were to come true. In repentance, "in the latter days", this would be completely, clearly understood. But the intents of God's heart were and are the salvation of His people; see on Jer. 29:11. In this case, the wrath of God works towards this situation, whereby His saving, restoring purpose is made real.

The repentance of Israel must be associated with an opening of their eyes to God's word. There is no other way men can come to repentance. Jer. 30:24 prophesies Jacob's final homecoming, and then comments: "In the latter days (not now) ye shall consider (understand) it". *Then* Israel will consider and understand the words of their prophets. "The Lord hath poured out upon (Israel) the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes (quoted in Rom. 11:8 concerning Israel's blindness to Christ)... the vision of all (God's word) is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed... (but) in that day shall the (spiritually) deaf hear the words of the book" (Is. 29:10,11,17,18). This will be when the book is *unsealed* at "the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4). We have shown elsewhere that Israel's minority repentance must occur prior to the Lord's return. Therefore there must be an upsurge in Biblical activity amongst those who will become the faithful remnant in latter day Israel. This will be brought about by the Elijah prophet- remembering that the Elijah prophet is framed in Malachi as a teacher of God's word, not just an imparter of it. Likewise John, in the spirit of Elijah, *taught* the people about the Lord's advent.

## Jeremiah Chapter 31

*Jeremiah 31:1 At that time, says Yahweh, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people-* The intention was that the ten tribes along with Judah would repent and return together to Zion, entering covenant relationship again under a new covenant based upon the promises to Abraham, whereby all Abraham's seed were God's people (Gen. 17:8). It is the common relationship of God's people to the same one God, the joint experience of repentance and forgiveness, which binds His people together. This potential didn't happen, and therefore is delayed until the last days and also reapplied in the experience of God's redeemed people today.

*Jeremiah 31:2 Thus says Yahweh, The people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest-* The implication is that many Israelites perished in Egypt by "the sword", and then found grace in the covenant made with them after leaving Egypt, in the Sinai wilderness. "The sword" is used to heighten the similarities with those who survived the Babylonian onslaught, and in "the wilderness" of Babylon became the good figs of Jer. 24 who would repent and also find grace in a new covenant. That was the intention. Despite living in houses in Babylon on a permanent basis (Jer. 29:28), they were (like us) to perceive that life as temporary, and the sophisticated city of Babylon as a wilderness. As God caused Israel to find "rest" in the promised land through Joshua-Jesus, so the exiles were intended to; and so can we in some sense allow God to cause us to enter into that rest (Heb. 4:3). Despite God causing them to enter the rest, they didn't (Heb. 3:11). The causative power of God was refused by them, just as His people today can refuse the Holy Spirit's work.

Yahweh had promised that He would lead His people on that wilderness journey from Babylon to Zion just as He had earlier led His people from Egypt to the same promised land. Jer. 31:2 had encouraged them that Israel "found grace in the wilderness" before, and they would do again, "When I go to cause [Israel] to go to their place of rest" (RV). God had promised in Jer. 31:9 that He would bring Israel on their journey from Babylon to Judah along the fertile crescent- He would "cause them to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble". This is why Isaiah's prophecies of the restoration from Babylon are shot through with allusion to the exodus and wilderness journey (e.g. Is. 43:2; 51:10; 63:11). Jer. 31:2 had prophesied of the returning Jews: "The people which were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him *to rest*"- just as Zech. 1:11 describes the land being "at rest" when they returned to rebuild Zion. My point is that Yahweh didn't give up with His people because many chose to remain in Babylon, and those who did make the journey didn't believe His promises of protection very strongly. He zealously worked with whatever they could present Him with.

*Jeremiah 31:3 Yahweh appeared of old to me saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you-* This had been Jeremiah's consistent message; that although he had to speak of judgment to come, the essence was God's love. As God potentially caused them to enter the rest (:2), so He drew them out of Egypt into the desert by grace, and so would He do in returning the exiles from Babylon to the promised land. But most preferred to remain in Babylon, just as the call of the Kingdom is resisted by many today. The Hebrew for "loving kindness" is related to the word for "grace" in :2. Perhaps Jeremiah as Judah's representative experienced this 'drawing up' unto salvation when he was "drawn up" out of certain death in the dungeon (Jer. 38:13, s.w. "with loving kindness have I drawn you [up]", Jer. 31:3).

*Jeremiah 31:4 Again will I build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel-* But Judah easily gave up the work of building; they had to be constantly coaxed to get on with it by Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah. They were, however, effectively declining to allow themselves to be built up into God's Kingdom, because they were too worried about building their own houses than God's. And so insofar as we too decline the spiritual upbuilding which there is available in God's word, so we decline a part in God's work of building a house for His Name. God would "build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel". The "virgin" here refers to the temple which was to be built by God, and yet it also clearly refers to the actual people of Judah who returned. In other words, their attitude to the temple was their attitude to themselves. Because they had such a low value of their own worth before God, they treated His work with a similar low value. And there is a great lesson for us here.

*Again you shall be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who make merry-* Jer. 31:15 (cp. Mt. 2:18) speaks of how Rachel weeps for her slain children, but here she is portrayed as a virgin who

takes her tambourine in hand and dances, entering a new covenant with her *ba'al*, her Lord, her husband, who has obliterated the memory of all her sins in a way that only a Divine being could do. Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to weeping Rachel, weeping over the children God had taken from her. And *yet...* according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of Jer. 31, this is the very same 'new covenant' into which we enter in baptism. This is God's joy over us, and it should be ours over Him. The "Again..." suggests that as Miriam and the women of Israel celebrated the Red Sea deliverance with tambourines and dancing, so all Israel would rejoice at the deliverance from Babylon. And yet most didn't want to leave Babylon, and the miserable few who did respond to Cyrus' decree returned seeking their own material benefit and grumbled at the famine they found in the land. This was because they had not really repented.

*Jeremiah 31:5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy its fruit-* The reference to Samaria reminds us that the ten and two tribes were to be united; see on :1. They did this at the restoration, but became so obsessed with treading out the grapes that they did it even on the Sabbath, and thereby disallowed the fulfillment of the Kingdom prophecies which were dependent upon them keeping the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15; Isaiah 58:13).

*Jeremiah 31:6 For there shall be a day when the watchmen on the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise, and let us go up to Zion to Yahweh our God-* The reference to Ephraim reminds us that the ten and two tribes were to be united; see on :1. The ten tribes would worship at Zion in the rebuilt temple, and not in Jeroboam's high places. But most of them chose to remain in captivity; so much potential was wasted.

*Jeremiah 31:7 For thus says Yahweh, Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout for the chief of the nations: publish, praise, and say, Yahweh, save Your people, the remnant of Israel-* It was God's intention that the restoration would not only unite Israel and Judah (see on :1), but the surrounding nations would turn to Yahweh and rejoice in His grace to Jacob; they would urge Yahweh onwards in saving His people, and share in that gracious redemption.

*Jeremiah 31:8 Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth, along with the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who travails with child together: a great company shall they return here-* The language of lame, limping Jacob and his wives and their children together all suggests Jacob returning from exile to his homeland. This could have happened at the restoration. "Company" translates a Hebrew word often used in the prophets of the company of nations associated with Egypt or Babylon, who would invade Israel and then be punished (Ez. 32:23 etc.). But the promises to Abraham were that a "company" (s.w.) of nations would and could become part of Abraham's seed (Gen. 28:3; 35:11; 48:4). The "great company" who were to participate in the restoration of God's Kingdom in Israel was intended to include this great company of Gentile nations, who at that time were to be judged but were intended along with the remnant of Judah to repent and come into covenant relationship with Yahweh, to "know Yahweh" as Ezekiel often expresses it. "A great company" didn't return from Babylon, according to the records in Ezra and Nehemiah. The majority chose to stay in comfortable Babylon.

*Jeremiah 31:9 They shall come with weeping; and with petitions will I lead them-* The weeping would be in repentance and they would be lead back to Zion in response to their petitions. And yet it would also be with the joy of people who know they have been forgiven (:4). But this wasn't the scene at the restoration; those who returned came as colonists do, seeking land for themselves and a good life. And they found famine in the land and cities in ruins.

*I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first born-* Both Ezra and Nehemiah wanted to have a Babylonian military escort on the journey back; they weren't sure that they would be given "a straight way" with Yahweh's protection. Neh. 4:10 records that "Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is *decayed* [s.w. "stumble", Jer. 31:9], and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall". They were easily discouraged by the words of the

surrounding world, by the apparent hopelessness of their task; and thus they stumbled. Ezra 8:21 LXX describes how Ezra fasted for them to be given a “straight way”, as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfill the prophecy. Note how Ezekiel’s vision of the cherubim featured “straight” progress; the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to “keep in step with the Spirit”... They were to walk “each one straight before him” (Is. 57:2 RVmg.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). Ps. 107:2,7 RV speak of Israel being gathered out of the nations and being led in a “straight way” to Zion, as they had [potentially] been enabled to do on their departure from Egypt. Yet then they spent 38 years walking a distance coverable in just 11 days- because they did not walk in the “straight way”. The house of Israel were to “measure the pattern” of the temple just as the Angel had done; they were to work in harmony with the Angel, laying out the temple exactly as the Angel had done in the preceding vision (Ez. 43:10 cp. Ez. 40:5-13). And we too are to follow where our Angel potentially enables us to go.

The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk "in a straight way" (s.w.) "by the rivers of waters"- and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a "right / straight way". He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true- they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today- to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness. I feel this is especially true in the matter of latter day witnessing.

*Jeremiah 31:10 Hear the word of Yahweh, you nations, and declare it in the islands afar off; and say, He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock-* This continues God's fantasy, if you like, His earnest hope and wish, that the return of His people to Him would be blessed by the nations and they too would eagerly turn to Him. The scenario whereby Babylon was to be destroyed was not His ideal intention. Time and again the Lord Jesus reapplies the language of the restoration from Babylon to what He is doing to all men and women who heed His call to come out from the world and follow Him. The ideas of bringing His sheep, "other sheep of mine", who will hear His voice and form one flock under one shepherd (Jn. 10:16)- all these are rooted in the restoration prophecies (Ez. 34; Ez. 37:21-28; Jer. 23:1-8; Jer. 31:1-10).

*Jeremiah 31:11 For Yahweh has ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he-* Redemption from he that is stronger is an allusion to the promise that Jacob would overcome his stronger brother, Esau (Gen. 25:23); and Esau as Edom was active in the destruction of Zion. But Jacob would be redeemed and return- if they wished. The suffering of God over the exiles all points forward to His later experience in the death of His Son. But note that God’s suffering was particularly because Israel would not return to Him. Had they done so, the hurt of their past sins would have been erased in a moment. God redeemed and ransomed Jacob, thereby enabling them to return from Babylon- but the majority preferred to ignore the call to return because they were so caught up in the good life. And likewise the hugely costly redemption of the world in the blood of Christ is painful for God insofar as so many, the majority, refuse it. The pain of providing this ransom and the hurt of human sin was one thing; the refusal of the offer of a way back to relationship with Him is far worse. From this we can perceive how thrilled God is when we turn to Him. And further, appreciating it should inspire our preaching, knowing the Father’s joy over just one true convert who will accept His ways in Truth and enter into loving relationship with Him.

Judah effectively refused their ransom and redemption. And so this great salvation was reapplied to salvation in Christ for a new Israel. These terms are together applied to our redemption from death (Hos. 13:14), and both terms are often used in the New Testament of our salvation in Christ.

*Jeremiah 31:12 They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow to the goodness of Yahweh, to the grain, and to the new wine, and to the oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all-* This was the potential. The wheat, wine and oil were all withheld by Yahweh as a result of their selfish materialism, according to Haggai and Malachi. And Neh. 5:3 specifically mentions that a “dearth” came even in Nehemiah’s time. The "watered garden" clearly alludes to Eden, which could have been restored at this time in the restored Kingdom, as Ezekiel's restoration prophecies make clear. This, along with the idea of no more tears of sorrow, is alluded to in Rev. 21:4; but it is all reapplied to the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth at the Lord's return.

*Jeremiah 31:13 Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow-* The "sorrow... mourning" was that of the exiles and survivors of the Babylonian onslaught, as the book of Lamentations makes apparent. This could all have been dramatically reversed had they repented and allowed the restoration to happen as God intended. But they didn't repent, even when God attempted to as it were force through the restoration. The young and old didn't rejoice together- the old men wept at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, whilst the younger ones rejoiced (Ezra 3:12). Sorrow at realizing their sins is a feature of the Ezra and Nehemiah records- rather than joy in the real experience of God's redemption. Again, are there similarities with ourselves? The life in Christ, the Kingdom life, is of all joy and peace through believing, of joy and peace in the spirit of holiness. But is this the life and mindset which we live?

*Jeremiah 31:14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness-* But the priests returned to mind their own fields because the tithes weren't paid to them (Neh. 13:10). One of the dominant features of salvation in God's Kingdom will be that of satisfaction, being satiated, utterly filled.

*And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says Yahweh-* When Israel were so far from God, He foretold the day when "my people will be gorged with my grace" (Jer. 31:14). The image of gorging upon grace is yet another reflection of the super-abounding nature of it. And this part of the new covenant to be made with Israel is true of us today, who have already entered that same covenant; it's a thought we can dwell upon as we eat at the Lord's table. And as we do so we can think of how God describes *His* feelings in all this: "I will find joy in them and in doing them good" (Jer. 32:41). God simply *loves* pouring out such grace. Let's try to catch something of this spirit of the grace of God. Let's try to adopt God's perspective. For what does He require more of a man, "but to do justly, and to love mercy (as God does, Mic. 7:18), and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8)?

*Jeremiah 31:15 Thus says Yahweh: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children-* "Ramah" means literally 'the high place'. There may be an allusion to how "Rachel", Jacob's idolatrous and faithless wife as representative of the women of Judah, had offered their children to Baal upon those high places. And now she realized that was all in vain. Apart from this approach, it is difficult to see any other specific significance in the mention of Ramah. The bitterness of her grief was because she knew she had sinned and sacrificed her children to that which had not profited; and yet even that grief could be assuaged by Yahweh's plan for her, if she would accept it. The historical Rachel died in sorrow, refusing comfort, and yet gave birth to Benjamin, 'son of my sorrow', renamed 'son of my right hand'. She was an appropriate symbol for Judah in their suffering. Out of it all could come mere sorrow, or the birth of a Messianic king and people. It all depended upon whether or not they would accept comfort.

*She refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more-* Is. 40:1,2 had spoken a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachel who refused to be comforted over her loss; they claimed they found "none to comfort" (Lam. 1:2,16,17,21). But they were willfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to- it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

The early chapters of Matthew contain at least three examples of quotations whose context just cannot fit the application given: Mt. 2:14,15 cp. Hos. 11:1; Mt. 2:17,18 cp. Jer. 31:15; Mt. 1:23 cp. Is. 7:14. Much Christian material about Israel shows how they have returned to the land, rebuilt the ruined cities, made the desert blossom etc., as fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Jeremiah etc. The context of these prophecies often doesn't fit a return to the land by Jews in the 20th century; but on the other hand, the correspondence between these prophecies and recent history is so remarkable that it can't be just coincidence. So again we are led to conclude that a few words here and there within a prophecy can sometimes have a fulfillment outside that which the context seems to require.

*Jeremiah 31:16 Thus says Yahweh: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says Yahweh; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy-* As explained on :15, it depended whether or not Rachel accepted the comfort of the prophetic word. Her "work", her labour pains in sorrow, could have been rewarded by the rebirth of a son, in the restoration of Judah from the land of the enemy.

God paints Himself as acting with the anger of a very angry husband, whose anger is rooted in the profoundness of His love for His wife. There is a dark side to intimacy. It's why families, lovers, both spiritual and natural, experience the heights of both love and frustration / anger with each other. With a love like God's, it's inevitable that there is a strong element of jealousy and potential hurt over us. It has to be so. And yet as we know the story of the prophets never ends with the angry judgment- amazingly, given this level of anger and judgment / retribution, there is always the passionate appeal for Israel to return, to recover love, romance and intimacy in the relationship. Taking as it were a snapshot of the nature of the judgments God expressed, this is indeed hard to swallow. It's hard to read Jer. 31:16-34, how God will slay Rachel's children, leave her weeping for them, and then dry her eyes and speak of a new covenant and new relationship with her. But the point of it all is that this indeed is how radical the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance really is in the lives of each of us. If a movie were to be made of all this, none of us would be able to resist it. The story of how through love gone sour, estrangement, rape and battery, a couple triumph in love and true, eternal intimacy. But this is the wonder and power of true repentance. And it is also a powerful window into the consequence and nature of human sin. These metaphors and images of God as the jilted lover convey the reality of sin and reconciliation in a way that no amount of prose ever could. And yet it wasn't only metaphor- all this was lived out in the feelings of Hosea for Gomer. He could only have had those feelings if he very deeply loved her. The whole story, the images and ideas... surely leave us knowing once and for all that our religion and relationship with God simply can never be merely abstract contemplation of Biblical ideas, devoid of commitment and passion in response to God's love. All these wonderful ideas come down to us through reading and reflection upon Scripture. But Bible reading, understood and felt as it should be, can from now on for us surely never again be a passive, neutral, private experience. If we truly are in covenant relationship with this wondrous God, it demands our all. Our failures, forgiven as they are, will haunt us for their awfulness; and the wonder of His love will never cease to move us to real tears in the midst of this unemotional, too busy, post modern world. And the experience of God's ever new love and forgiveness will lead us to rise above all the examples of failed relationships and marriages we are surrounded with, to realize quite simply that those whom we love, we forgive. And the vastness of God's love means that He genuinely forgives us. And we too will go on risking ourselves, making ourselves vulnerable, to love again, to forgive again, knowing His love for us. But of course all this hinges around our perception of our sins and unfaithfulness being what it is.

*Jeremiah 31:17 There is hope for your latter end, says Yahweh; and your children shall come again to their own border-* The historical Rachel died in sorrow, refusing to be comforted with the thought that her suffering had brought a son into the world. And so Zion could choose whether or not to accept the prophetic word of comfort, and to understand their sufferings as being but the labour pains which would bring forth the restored, revived Kingdom of God in Israel.

*Jeremiah 31:18 I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as an untrained calf: turn me, and I shall be turned; for You are Yahweh my God-* See on Jer. 18:8. The appeal for Jerusalem to be "instructed" in Jer. 6:8 uses this same word translated "chastised", or "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). His desire was to turn them, to make them repent, and to return them (s.w.) to their land in glory. But they had to themselves desire to be turned. The work of the Spirit for us under the new covenant is the same; even if we lack the steel in our will to repent, we will be made repentant- if we desire the Spirit to move. Psychologically we will be empowered, or turned / made repentant, if we have that desire to be repentant. That desire is not the same as the repentance. It's not as if God is saying that if we repent, then He is there for us. The offer is more than that. It is that if we desire to repent, He will psychologically turn us. Repentance itself is therefore a gift (Acts 3:26; 11:18). The next verse is explicit to this effect; it is after the Divine turning that they repent.

*Jeremiah 31:19 Surely after that I was turned, I repented-* See on :18. LXX "After my captivity I repented".

*And after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh-* Jeremiah speaks in the first person perhaps because he had a personal need for repentance and forgiveness, which typified that of Judah. The sins in view may have been things committed in "my youth", just as Israel's earlier sins were now finding them out. Now, "I groaned for the day of shame" in his youth (LXX).

*I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I bore the reproach of my youth-* Our shame should be before God

for our sins against Him, and not before men. Hence the prophets often criticize Israel for not being ashamed of their sins before God (Jer. 6:15). Our shame before men leads to anger; our shame before God is resolved in repentance and belief in His gracious forgiveness. Thus Jeremiah recalls how his repentance involved being ashamed, and yet then being "instructed" (Jer. 31:19). It's through knowing this kind of shame before God that we come to a position where we are unashamed.

*Jeremiah 31:20 Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says Yahweh-* Here the two tribes are reminded that even after the deportation of the ten tribes ("Ephraim"), God still considered them His "darling child". Judah were so wrong to consider themselves so far superior to Israel, considering that God had no relationship with Ephraim because they lacked the Jerusalem temple. God's strong intention was to regather the ten tribes when Judah were regathered. But despite the yearning of God to do this, it didn't happen; because as noted on :18, they didn't even want to repent. The unrequited yearning of God for human repentance is a tragedy, and He must be so thrilled when we at least desire to respond. And Jeremiah experienced this same yearning of the heart for his people (s.w. Jer. 4:19). That yearning should be ours as we beg men and women to respond; our evangelism should be done out of a heart that bleeds for people.

*Jeremiah 31:21 Set up road signs, make guideposts-* We may well enquire how travellers were supposed to do this. Maybe the idea is that the first ones to repent were to return and as it were pioneer the way for others to follow. It could be that the idea was that the return of God's people from captivity was to set up the way for the peoples of their captivity to follow them in coming to Zion and accepting Israel's God. Or perhaps the contradiction is purposeful; the question would naturally occur as to how they were supposed to do this. And the answer is that God would empower them and show them the way back to Him (see on :18).

*Set your heart towards the highway, even the way by which you went: turn again, virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities-* This could be specifically addressed to the ten tribes, "Ephraim" (:20), urging them to leave the lands of their captivity. If they had the mental desire, the heart, the set heart, the mindset, the desire to repent / turn again, then they would be turned again; both spiritually, back to God, and literally, back to the land (:18). This is the vision of Ps. 84:5 ESV: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion". But it also had reference to the call for exiled Judah to return. The command to flee the land of the north [Babylon] is to be found in Is. 48:20; Jer. 51:6; Zech. 2:6; and they were to "get thee up to the high mountain" (Is. 40:9), using the same word about Judah 'going up' from Babylon to Israel. But the majority of Judah remained in Babylon. And the majority of those who did return, only did so in order for purely personal benefit- of having their own house and land. They 'went up' to the land, but not to Zion. With reference to Is. 40:9, Hag 1:7-9 exhorted them: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much [i.e. they expected the promised Kingdom blessings], and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house". Their focus was on their own lands and farms rather than the glory of Zion (as Neh. 13:10,11). They stood related to the things of God's kingdom, but never ventured beyond their own personal self-interest. They would not accept that God manifestation rather than human salvation and pleasure was the essential purpose of their God.

*Jeremiah 31:22 How long will you go here and there, you backsliding daughter?-* The exile is described as a being tossed to and fro, continual movement within the empires who had taken them captive. But "how long" they were in exile was an open question; they could have been restored sooner had they wished it, and finally the 70 years of exile until full restoration of the Kingdom were reinterpreted in Daniel 9 to be 70 weeks of days, i.e. a far longer period. See on Jer. 25:12; 29:10.

*For Yahweh has created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall follow after a man-* This suggests that the woman, Judah, were to take the initiative with God by mapping out the roads they would take back to Zion- the suggestion could be that the 70 year period of captivity could have been shortened had Judah taken the initiative. This refers to the way in which Ruth and Naomi, herself a returned exile, summed up the courage to 'go after' Boaz, to present herself to him for marriage- reflecting the spiritual ambition of all those who seek redemption and restoration in Christ. If they had the desire to repent, then they would be given repentance [as well as forgiveness]; see on :18. But they had to take the initiative, in seeking it. And yet even that initiative was "created" by God.

A very slight change in the vocalization of the Hebrew text here gives the reading "a woman shall be turned into a man". And God would create this; He would give the stereotypically weak woman the courage and strength of a man. Or "turned" could be "returned"; God would create the desire for the woman to return to the man who had divorced her and against whom she had committed multiple adulteries. Whatever the reading, the impression is that God would create desire and provide psychological strengthening in a new and superhuman way. This is the law being written in the heart, the work of the Spirit promised in the new covenant which God was offering His people at this time.

*Jeremiah 31:23 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Yet again shall they use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I shall bring again their captivity: Yahweh bless you, habitation of righteousness, mountain of holiness-* Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2). The "mountain of holiness" is consistently used for Zion, with the intention that at the restoration from exile, Zion would become the "holy mountain" which features in the Kingdom prophecies of Is. 11:9; 56:7; 65:25; Joel 3:17; Obadiah 17, to which the restored exiles would return (Is. 66:20; Ez. 20:40; Zech. 8:3). The phrase is also used of heaven itself (Ps. 3:4 etc.). The idea was that the Kingdom of Heaven would be established on earth, centered in Zion. This could've happened at the restoration, but it didn't; the returned exiles were to build the 'holy mountain' in the new temple system they were commanded to build in Ez. 43:12. But they didn't fulfill that prophecy. And so Rev. 21,22 use the idea and apply it to the restored Kingdom of God on earth at the time of the Lord's return.

*Jeremiah 31:24 Judah and all its cities shall dwell therein together, the farmers, and those who go about with flocks-* The idea of farmers and shepherds living within the area of the restored Zion is found in Ez. 48:18 (see notes there). But the commands of Ez. 40-48 weren't obeyed by the returned exiles.

*Jeremiah 31:25 For I have satiated the weary soul, and every sorrowful soul have I replenished-* This is the sorrow of :12 (s.w.) being removed for the returned exiles- but they chose not to accept this possible scenario. God would work within them psychologically through His Spirit, all part of the promise of the new covenant which we are under too. As He had "filled" them with sorrow and panic at the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 13:13, s.w. "replenished"), so He would fill them with joy and take away their sorrow.

*Jeremiah 31:26 On this I awakened, and saw; and my sleep was sweet to me-* The preceding revelation had been given in a dream which Jeremiah, perhaps through Baruch, wrote down. He found this Kingdom vision "sweet", and yet he seems to forget it when he gets bogged down in the "sorrow" (cp. :25) of his book of Lamentations, failing to see the silver lining.

*Jeremiah 31:27 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of animal-* To sow seed within a family or house means to add new members to it. Israel and Judah were to be reunited at the restoration, and a totally new creation of people and even animals was to come. This will find its fulfillment when the Lord returns to reestablish the Kingdom, seeing that the exiles' lack of repentance precluded it from happening in their time. The Hebrew words for "sow... seed" occur together in the record of the Genesis creation, translated 'yielding / bearing seed' (Gen. 1:11,12,29 etc.). The idea is of a new creation, and is used of the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Is. 30:23; 55:10; Ez. 36:9-11.

*Jeremiah 31:28 It shall happen that like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict, so will I watch over them to build and to plant, says Yahweh-* God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10).

Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The

Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

*Jeremiah 31:29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge-* Part of their repentance would involve taking personal responsibility for sins, rather than blaming their situation on others, complaining that they were suffering from the effects of the sins of their fathers. To this day, this has to be part of repentance; a taking of the blame for our sins, rather than blaming anyone else or our gene pool. Ezekiel was up against this problem in his appeal to the exiles to repent. He labours the point in Ez. 18 that fathers cannot be held responsible for the spiritual failure of their children in all cases. Ez. 18:2 uses the same figure of eating sour grapes. This principle leads us to reflection upon the case of elders whose adult children fall into sin. It should be noted that the bishop's qualification is that he *knows* how to rule his own house (1 Tim. 3:5). It may be that as with Samuel and other elders, their children or converts do not 'turn out' well. If this is because there was a lack of spiritual leadership, this disqualifies a brother. But if he *knew* how to rule, but they rebelled, then he is not thereby disqualified.

*Jeremiah 31:30 But each one shall die for his own iniquity: every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge-* See on :29. Their repentance would involve recognizing that they personally had committed the sins which they previously had blamed their fathers for. The exiles likely blamed their situation upon Manasseh's sins, without recognizing that they were repeating his sins themselves. And yet it seems that in Jer. 32:18, Jeremiah himself has something of Israel's wrong attitude, even though he theoretically knew that the children were suffering for committing the same sins as the fathers. We can know such truths in theory and yet struggle to accept them in practice.

*Jeremiah 31:31 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah-* Israel and Judah were to be united on the basis of their repentance, experience of forgiveness and joint part in this new covenant. It was refused by them at the time, but is now offered to all in Christ. And this unity between those within it should be likewise experienced. The cup of the new covenant which features in the breaking of bread service is the visible symbol in our age of the commemoration of this covenant; and yet sadly it has become the tool for division within the body of those within the new covenant. This really is so tragic.

The new covenant could have then been established, requiring the abrogation of the Old Covenant [the law of Moses] on the basis of an acceptable sacrifice. Somehow, this would have been possible. But it was deferred until the time of the Lord Jesus. That covenant required Judah to have God's law written on their hearts, so that they each had the knowledge of God (Jer. 31:34); and yet Mal. 2:5-7 laments that the priests were more interested in divorcing their wives than teaching God's law to the people; their lips didn't keep nor teach the knowledge of God

*Jeremiah 31:32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-* That old covenant had been broken. It was not so much that the Lord Jesus removed it in His death; it had already been broken. For they had departed from their God and married the gods of the Gentiles; hence the reference to their breaking the covenant although God was their husband. The old covenant was the marriage contract between them and God. And yet He continued faithful to them at that time; hence AVmg. "Which My covenant they break; and should I (therefore) have continued an husband unto them?"

*Which My covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh-* Israel rejected God's covenant, and therefore He rejected them in that He broke the unbreakable-by-Him covenant (2 Kings 17:15,20; Zech. 11:10). In reality, they had rejected themselves, and broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). It could not and would not be broken by Him- it was only they who could break it. And so with us.

*Jeremiah 31:33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people-* See on 1 Sam. 10:9. There is a repeated theme that Israel's entry into the New Covenant will be associated with God doing something to their hearts, confirming their own change of mind. In other words, the covenant is largely a matter of the mind. This new state of mind is in fact fundamentally part of being in covenant relationship with God. This leads us to the paramount need for us to develop genuine spiritual mindedness, the thinking, the breathing of God's Spirit in our minds. So God will act upon Israel's heart directly, using the medium of His word to do so. The initiative is God's; He will write His word upon their hearts. He is not passively offering people the opportunity to do it to themselves; He will do it to Israel. The same heart-swop operation is described in Ez. 36:25,26. Jer. 31:33 said that God would place His laws in Israel's heart; in Ez. 36 we read that He will place His Spirit in their hearts. It is the Spirit which makes us obedient to the word. Those within the new covenant today receive this same gift of the Spirit; not today in terms of miraculous gifts, but the operation of God on the human heart which brings about the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant to be "their God" (Gen. 17:-8-10). In this sense the new covenant is based upon the promises to Abraham, and in essence preceded the old covenant given on Sinai. Entrance to the new covenant is by baptism, and therefore the gift of the Spirit is given at baptism, as is made clear in the Acts record.

Heb. 8 proves that we are under the new covenant by quoting from Jer. 31, which is a prophecy of how in the future, Israel will repent, and will enter into the new covenant. Twice the Spirit uses Jer. 31:31 to prove to us that we are under the new covenant now (see Heb. 8:6-13 and 10:16-19); yet Jer. 31 is a prophecy of how natural Israel in the future will enter into that covenant, after their humiliation at the hands of their future invaders. So we are being taught that our entering of the covenant now is similar to how natural Israel will enter that covenant in the future. The point is really clinched by the way the Spirit cites Jer. 31 as relevant to us today. The reasoning goes that because Jer. 31:34 speaks of sin forgiven for those who accept the new covenant, therefore we don't need sacrifices or human priesthood now, because Jer. 31:34 applies to us. So therefore God writing in our hearts is going on now, too. This is confirmed by Paul's allusion to Jer. 31 in 2 Cor. 3:3. God wrote with His Spirit on our hearts, He made a new covenant on the covenant-tables of our heart. Likewise 2 Cor. 1:22: "Who hath also sealed us, and given us the earnest of the spirit in our hearts". There are several prophecies which speak of Israel entering that new covenant, and what it will mean to them. All of them, in some sense, apply to us who are now in the new covenant. All of us should be earnestly seeking to appreciate the more finely exactly what our covenant with God means, exactly what covenant relationship with God really entails.

*Jeremiah 31:34 And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know Me, from their least to their greatest, says Yahweh-* Prophet, priest and people were all to be sharing God's word; all society was to be involved (Jer. 23:34). But the false prophets gave their words to the priests, whose duty it was to teach their words; and then the people spread those words further. This was how Israel should have been, with the ordinary people spreading the knowledge of God's word; and indeed this is the ideal situation of the Kingdom age, although such a teaching ministry will ultimately not be needed because all shall know / have relationship experience of Yahweh through their experience of forgiveness. And those under the new covenant begin this now.

*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more-* The knowledge of God will no longer have to be taught in theoretical terms because the experience of forgiveness is to know God. Being under the new covenant means that we will know Yahweh, on account of our sins being forgiven. We will be certain of their forgiveness, not just hoping for the best. So often the prophets use the idea of "knowing God" as an idiom for living a life totally dominated by that knowledge. The new covenant which we have entered is all about 'knowing' God. The knowledge of God elicits repentance, real repentance; and reveals an equally real forgiveness. It is possible for those in Christ to *in practice* not know God at all. Thus Paul exhorted the Corinthian church: "Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God" (1 Cor. 15:34). The knowledge and practice of the presence of God ought to keep us back from sin.

*Jeremiah 31:35 Thus says Yahweh, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar; Yahweh of Armies is His name-* Just as God stirs up the sea, so as noted on :33, He can stir up the human heart. The same immense power manifest in the natural creation is available in the spiritual creation of new hearts and people.

*Jeremiah 31:36 If these ordinances depart from before Me, says Yahweh, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever-* Israel did cease from being a nation, but only temporarily. The promise here is that God would not permanently "forever" reject them. Or we could understand this promise as meaning that "the seed of Israel" were a nation "forever" only because God changed the definition of them from natural to spiritual, as Gal. 3:27-29 and many New Testament passages makes clear. Or it could be that there was always a "seed of Israel" before God in that there was always a faithful, believing minority. There is reason to think that there has always been a "remnant" of Jews who believe in the true Messiah- Paul's reasoning in Romans certainly implies this. If some Jews have always 'held the truth'- then did we not ought to be seeking them out? For there aren't so many within our community. Only if Heaven above can be measured "then will I cast off *all* the seed of Israel" (Jer. 31:37 RV). Clearly not *all* Israel have been cast off- only if the Heavens pass away will all the seed of Israel cease from being "before me", i.e. in some sort of covenant with God (Jer. 31:36). Paul surely alludes here when saying that God has not [totally] cast off His people because there is always "the remnant". There will always be a remnant of Israel open to true conversion in every generation.

*Jeremiah 31:37 Thus says Yahweh: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says Yahweh-* But "My God will cast them away" (Hos. 9:17; Is. 54:6); the same Hebrew word occurs when God says He would "reject" Israel (Hos. 4:6). God spoke in His wrath, He has passion, but likewise His grace is such that He can relent from what He has spoken in His wrath. This is the paradox of His love and grace. For other explanations of the paradox, see on :36.

Only *part* of Israel are blind to Messiah; a majority, but not all of them (Rom. 11:5,7,25). I don't think that Paul is merely speaking of the situation in the first century, where clearly some Jews did believe. I say this because Jer. 31:37 clearly states that Israel will never be "cast off"; yet, according to Romans 11, Israel are only not cast off because some of them do believe in Christ. The fact Israel are not now totally "cast off" therefore indicates that there always will be a remnant of faithful Jews- faithful to God's Son and trusting in grace rather than law (Rom. 11:6). Therefore we should be hopeful that at least a remnant will respond to our preaching to them.

*Jeremiah 31:38 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that the city shall be built to Yahweh from the tower of Hananel to the gate of the corner-* Like the commands of Ez. 40-48 this is command more that prediction. This is the same basic dimension as in Ez. 40-48, but as noted extensively there, the exiles didn't obey it, building a far smaller temple and not following the ordinances commanded there; and thereby precluded the reestablishment of the Kingdom at that time. Nehemiah attempted to 'make holy to Yahweh' (:40) this area (Neh. 3:1; 12:39) but this was not how things continued.

*Jeremiah 31:39 The measuring line shall go out further straight onward to the hill Gareb, and shall turn about to Goah-* See on :38. LXX "compassed with a circular wall of choice stones". This was not then fulfilled, but the wall of costly stones is spoken of in Rev. 21:19, and Zech. 14:10 has the same ideas in view. The prophecies which the exiles didn't allow to be fulfilled were reapplied and rescheduled to the establishment of the Kingdom on earth at the Lord's return.

*Jeremiah 31:40 The whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields to the brook Kidron, to the corner of the horse gate towards the east, shall be holy to Yahweh; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever-* See on :38. This included the valley of Hinnom, where the children were sacrificed to Baal. Finally there would be permanent cleansing, and Jerusalem would never again be thrown down. This will only finally come true in the latter day fulfillment, as Nehemiah's attempt to fulfill it (Neh. 3:28) was not followed up by the exiles.

## Jeremiah Chapter 32

*Jeremiah 32:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar-* The siege began in the ninth year (Jer. 39:1). But the Babylonians temporarily left Jerusalem to deal with the Egyptians (Jer. 37:5), and Jeremiah tried to leave Jerusalem. But he was arrested, falsely accused and imprisoned, as Jer. 37 explains. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological; Jer. 32 speaks of his time in prison.

*Jeremiah 32:2 Now at that time the king of Babylon's army was besieging Jerusalem; and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the king of Judah's house-* Although the Babylonians had generally left Jerusalem to fight the Egyptians (Jer. 37:5), they clearly left some of their army outside Jerusalem. "The court of the guard" doesn't mean that "the guard" were there; but rather that it was a section of the Palace court where prisoners were guarded.

*Jeremiah 32:3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up saying, Why do you prophesy and say, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it-* The message of Jeremiah was countercultural, and exactly the opposite of what people wanted to hear; and therefore in direct collision with the message of the false prophets. We are in a similar position with the message we speak in the last days.

*Jeremiah 32:4 And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall see his eyes-* Zedekiah's response to a message he didn't want to accept was to shoot the messenger and discredit him. That is the same basic human response to the incisive personal challenge of God's word. That is why there is so much attempt to discredit the Bible. No matter how politely worded and with what apparent sophistication and eloquence, this is the same basic mindset as Zedekiah's desire to discredit Jeremiah.

Jer. 34:5 says that "You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord!". It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

*Jeremiah 32:5 And he shall bring Zedekiah to Babylon, and he shall be there until I visit him, says Yahweh: though you fight with the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper?-* This 'visiting' was related to Zedekiah's repentance. He had earlier been told he would be killed, but in fact he died in peace and with respect (Jer. 34:5). This was presumably due to his repentance. God's 'visiting' him, His involvement in his life, was in response to that repentance; but it could also have been in giving him repentance. See on Jer. 31:18.

*Jeremiah 32:6 Jeremiah said, The word of Yahweh came to me saying-* The response to Zedekiah's opposition was not in further condemnation of him, but rather in repeated reassurance that for those open to it, the prophetic word of the restored kingdom was going to come about- now matter how unlikely that might immediately seem.

*Jeremiah 32:7 Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come to you, saying, Buy my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it-* Jeremiah was a priest, so Hanamel also was likely a priest. But they were forbidden to own property. This strange command was therefore to demonstrate the degree to which truly the old covenant had been ended because Israel had broken the contract, and those who wished could accept the new one (Jer. 31:31,32). This would explain why in :8 Jeremiah appears to have been given some special reassurance that "then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh".

*Jeremiah 32:8 So Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of Yahweh, and said to me, Please buy my field that is in Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself-* As explained on :7, this was illegal for Jeremiah under the old covenant. But that covenant had been broken and therefore ended. This is why Jeremiah now receives special

confirmation that truly, this request to buy property was "the word of Yahweh". For God speaks to us through situations.

*Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh-* Peter knew that if it really was the Lord Jesus out there on the water, then He would bid him walk on the water to Him. Peter knew his Lord, and the sort of things He would ask men to do- the very hardest things for them in their situation. He knew how Jesus could be a demanding Lord. Jeremiah "knew that this was the word of the Lord" when he was asked to do something so humanly senseless- to buy property when he was in prison, when the land was clearly about to be overrun by the Babylonians.

*Jeremiah 32:9 I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver-* This cheap price reflects the collapse of value in property due to the war. We wonder from where the imprisoned Jeremiah had this money. He presumably had access to some level of wealth, and had the silver brought to him in the prison. We can imagine how many people would have remarked upon his apparent foolishness. News of the transaction would have spread widely, and would have been a powerful testament to his faith in the fulfillment of his prophecies.

*Jeremiah 32:10 I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances-* As noted on :9, this was a major testimony to faith in the prophetic word of restoration. This explains the emphasis in the record on witnesses and the public, legally attested nature of the transaction.

*Jeremiah 32:11 So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and that which was open-* "Contracts stamped upon clay tablets have been found in Babylonia, enclosed in an envelope of clay, on the outside of which an exact duplicate of the contract was impressed: if in course of time any disagreement arose, and it was suspected that the outside text had been tampered with, the envelope was broken in the presence of witnesses to see if the inside text agreed with it or not. Earthen jars containing such duplicate contracts have been excavated at Nippur". But see on :14.

*Jeremiah 32:12 And I delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses who subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the guard-* Adam Clarke offers a slight variation upon the suggestion made on :11: "A duplicate of the deed was drawn, which was not to be sealed, but to lie open for the inspection of those concerned in some public place where it might be safe and always to be seen. The original, which was sealed up, was put in an earthen pitcher in order to be preserved from accidents. This was delivered by the purchaser into the hands of a third party, to be preserved for the use of the purchaser, and witnesses were called to attest this delivery. They subscribed the book of the purchase, perhaps a town book, or register, where such purchases were entered. Baruch was a scribe by profession; and the deeds were delivered into his hands, before witnesses, to be preserved as above. Perhaps the law, in this case, required that the instrument should be thus lodged. But, in the present case, both the deeds, the original and the duplicate, were put into the earthen pitcher because the city was about to be burnt; and if lodged as usual, they would be destroyed in the general conflagration". In this case, we see again Jeremiah's faith in the fall of Jerusalem which he had prophesied.

*Jeremiah 32:13 I commanded Baruch before them, saying-* As explained on :12, this departure from usual custom was because Jeremiah believed Jerusalem was about to be burnt and all such records would be lost. The people apparently agreed to this, because it was tacitly obvious that Jeremiah's words about Jerusalem were going to be fulfilled.

*Jeremiah 32:14 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase which is sealed, and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel; that they may continue many days-* See on :11,12. However, the Hebrew translated "open" is the word for "exile", literally 'to be denuded', and thence 'to go into captivity'. If the need was simply to express the fact that a copy of the contract was visible to all, a different word would have been more appropriate. But this word is the one used for 'carrying away into captivity' (Jer. 29:7,14 and very often). So the idea may be that a copy of the deed was to be taken into captivity, and the sealed copy left in Jerusalem. This witness to faith in restoration was to be with the captives.

*Jeremiah 32:15 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land-* The idea was that this would be the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which Jeremiah was prophesying. But here we read of buying for money, deeds, witnesses etc. The kingdom which was then possible was still somewhat human; the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom will not feature these things, and so we have to again conclude that the message of a restored kingdom was reapplied, reinterpreted and rescheduled to the last days. And not every detail of the original prophecies will therefore literally come about.

*Jeremiah 32:16 Now after I had delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to Yahweh, saying-* What follows, climaxing in :24 and :25, is again Jeremiah's struggle with God. He had been obedient, apparently for the sake of being obedient to a Divine command, but he struggled with how ever this could come true. Despite all the prophecies of the restoration which had already come through his mouth. This tension between theoretical knowledge and personal, enthusiastic belief in the truths contained therein remains the struggle within every believer of all ages.

*Jeremiah 32:17 Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for You-* As noted on :16, Jeremiah here struggles between what he knows theoretically, and accepting that spending his money on something which seemed ludicrous and fruitless was actually God's will. God will quote back his words to him in :27, asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true. And we are invited to do so likewise through the experiences brought into our lives. Perhaps with later reflection (see on :25), Jeremiah realized that he had inadvertently quoted the words of God in reminding a likewise doubting Abraham and Sarah: "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" (Gen. 18:14). And the Hebrew word translated "hard" is that usually translated "wonder". In our moments of wonder, and as the afterglow of them permeates our lives, it becomes easier to believe that nothing is too wonderful for our God of wonders to do for us. For He *is* the God who does wonders, He *is* wonderful and awesome. Jeremiah theoretically learnt the lesson from God's words to Abraham and Sarah; for he alludes to it here. But God has to remind him soon afterwards in Jer. 32:26,27: "Then came the word of the Lord unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: *is* there any thing too hard [wonderful] for me?". We think we know all about wonder, when actually we don't. Our lack of total faith shows that we do indeed think God's wonder is limited. Because something is hard / marvellous in our eyes doesn't mean it is in God's eyes (Zech. 8:6).

*Jeremiah 32:18 Who show loving kindness to thousands, and recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the mighty God, Yahweh of Armies is His name-* His mention of the sins of the fathers affecting their children seems dangerously close to the very complaint of Israel which he had rebuked in Jer. 31:30. Jeremiah here himself has something of Israel's wrong attitude, even though he theoretically knew that the children were suffering for committing the same sins as the fathers. We can know such truths in theory and yet struggle to accept them in practice.

*Jeremiah 32:19 Great in counsel, and mighty in working; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give each one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings-* Jeremiah had no problem in believing that God judges sin; but he finds it harder to believe in grace, and in the promised restoration. For he seems to think that God's judgment of sin surely precluded a restoration in which he would actually own the property he had just bought. We likewise struggle to believe the good news that seems too good to believe, preferring to wallow in the things of sin and its judgment.

*Jeremiah 32:20 Who performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even to this day, both in Israel and among other men; and made Yourself a name, as it is at this day-* This is powerful proof that the concept of the Name of God is far more than simply a word, a lexical item, "Yahweh". It is primitive to then argue about the pronunciation of that word as if that is what the Name is all about. The Name was "made" progressively over time and the experience of God in the lives of men. It is however more than simply a reputation acquired in history. Verses 18 and 19 have listed some of the characteristics of the Name as it was declared to Moses in Ex. 34. It is the articulation of that Name in history, in the very human history of individual lives and hearts as well as in the path of nations, which progressively builds up the glory of that Name; and it came to its acme in the death of His Son on the cross.

*Jeremiah 32:21 And brought forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, wonders, a strong hand, an outstretched arm and with great terror-* The exodus from Egypt was presented in Isaiah and by allusion in Jeremiah as the template for Judah's restoration from Babylon. But with the Babylonians outside the city gates, it all seemed too hard to believe for Jeremiah; that he too would be exiled but restored. This is the limitation of any total or misplaced focus upon true theology, correct doctrine. It may all be true; but grasping correct theology is not the same as personal faith- that this is and shall be true for me.

*Jeremiah 32:22 And gave them this land, which You swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey-* Jeremiah knew the theoretical truth, that God could give His people the land as He had done historically, by amazing miracles. But he was being asked to believe that he personally would have an inheritance, a real tangible plot of land, in the restored Kingdom. For he tacitly realizes that God could again give Israel their land. But he falters when it comes to personally believing that he will be there, and that it will be personally real to him. So it can be for us. We may be able to fluently and confidently proclaim that the Kingdom of God shall be established on this earth, furnishing clear Bible proofs for it. But do we believe that we personally shall be there? This was the struggle of Jeremiah at this point, and surely it is not unknown to us.

*Jeremiah 32:23 And they came in, and possessed it, but they didn't obey Your voice, neither walked in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do: therefore You have caused all this evil to come on them-* It seems that Jeremiah considered the sins of Israel so great that the promised restoration wouldn't happen, and therefore buying a property in the hope of such restoration was foolishness. Israel were obedient to parts of the Mosaic legislation, and yet here Jeremiah claims that "they have done nothing of all that You commanded them". He correctly understood that obeying bits and pieces of a religious code, subscribing to some kind of spiritual culture in some parts of human life, is in fact 'nothing'. This will not save anyone; and that again is a challenge to us all. For over time, our faith does have elements of religion and culture within it. To break one part of the Mosaic law was to break all of it (James 2:10). And so in fact nobody apart from the Lord Jesus did anything of that which was commanded. The only way to salvation therefore was from a new covenant- the very offer God had just made in Jer. 31:32,33.

*Jeremiah 32:24 Behold, the siege mounds, they have come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what You have spoken has happened; and behold, You see it-* "Behold" is asking God to 'see' the current realities as if He didn't see them; but the sentence concludes with accepting that "You see it". The theme of this section is that Jeremiah through his struggles with God, and having the courage to articulate them in words, comes to the right conclusions. God's response to him is merely confirming what Jeremiah had already come to perceive. This happens in our lives too.

*Jeremiah 32:25 You have said to me, Lord Yahweh, Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans-* Jeremiah stops short of charging God with folly, as we should. But he openly expresses his struggle with being asked to spend his money, perhaps all his savings and wealth, on what seemed to be pointless. Perhaps he stops short here, in mid sentence almost, because the answer was already clear to him- if indeed God could do all things, then He could restore Judah so that this purchase would be worthwhile and Jeremiah could enjoy his purchase. And as often happens with us, God's subsequent word to him simply confirmed to him the truth of the conclusion he had internally reached, unspoken, unarticulated as it was.

*Jeremiah 32:26 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying-* As explained on :16,17, God is asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true.

*Jeremiah 32:27 Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?-* See on :17. God quotes back his words of :17, asking him to believe in practice what he knew theoretically to be true. And we are invited to do so likewise through the experiences brought into our lives. See on Jer. 33:3.

*Jeremiah 32:28 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it-* God repeats word for word what was in

Jeremiah's mind. This is the way His word works, taking our thoughts and fears right out of our minds.

*Jeremiah 32:29 And the Chaldeans who now fight against this city shall come and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal, and poured out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger-* The rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

*Jeremiah 32:30 For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only that which was evil in My sight from their youth; for the children of Israel have only provoked Me to anger with the work of their hands, says Yahweh-* God is agreeing with Jeremiah about the sinfulness of His people. "They have *only* provoked me" agrees with Jeremiah's claim that they had done nothing of that which was commanded them (:23). God at great length portrays the sinfulness of His people; but in order to lead up to the overpowering wonder of the way that He, the God who can do anything, can forgive and restore even such people. Jeremiah balked at this, just as we may encounter someone so mixed up in their mind with addictions and other issues that we wonder whether they can ever be psychologically healed. It's as if God goes through all their problems, agreeing with us that they are indeed incurable- and then cures them by His Spirit working in the innermost mind and heart of men.

*Jeremiah 32:31 For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My wrath from the day that they built it even to this day; that I should remove it from before My face-* Jerusalem was first built by Jews at the time of David and Solomon, and it seems that even from that time it provoked Him to wrath, and He wanted to remove it from His presence. The historical record is therefore very gracious in not recording all the idolatry which was ongoing there even in those times.

*Jeremiah 32:32 Because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem-* And therefore, the king, princes, priests and false prophets were to be punished through the Babylonian invasion. A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

*Jeremiah 32:33 They have turned to Me the back and not the face-* Israel were driven away from God's face / presence because they had already hid themselves from His face by their sins (Is. 59:2; Jer. 32:33 cp. 33:5). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9) says it all.

*And though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction-* Several times God speaks of His rising up early in the morning through the ministry of the prophets, every single day since Israel left Egypt (2 Chron. 36:15; Jer. 7:13,25). The figure is stressed- God Himself rose up early every day to teach and appeal to His people (Jer. 32:33). Alarm clocks have changed our appreciation of this. Have you ever had to make yourself wake up before dawn, without an alarm clock? You can only do it by having a deep internal, subconscious awareness that you must get up early. You don't sleep well, you keep waking up and wondering if it's time to get up. So to make oneself rise up early was easily understood as a figure expressing great mental effort. And God did this *every day* for centuries...

*Jeremiah 32:34 Instead they set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it-* Ezekiel

was given a vision of how within the holy place, idols were worshipped and even depicted upon the walls.

*Jeremiah 32:35 They built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I didn't command them, neither did it come into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin-* "Neither did it come into My mind" suggests God as if He were surprised and outraged that Israel did these things. Although God is outside time, this mustn't lead us to conclude that He is somehow static and unfeeling; He reveals Himself as accommodating Himself to men to the extent that He has feelings of joy at the moment of our repentance (consider the Father rushing out to the returning son) and sorrow and anguish at the times of our apostasy (consider the Almighty "rising early and sending" the prophets). Although He is outside time, yet He limits His omniscience (as He evidently limits His omnipotence). It could even be that although He *could* see every possible future and foresee our behaviour well before our birth, He somehow ignores this possibility. This is why He is described as being disappointed at Israel's level of response to His love, shocked at their sins, surprised at their perversions (e.g. Jer. 19:5; 32:35).

*Jeremiah 32:36 Now therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning this city, about which you say, It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence-* Who is meant by "you" is discussed on :43. It was God who had 'said' that the city would be given to the Babylonians. But He seems to here rebuke Jeremiah for having said this to Him. Because His point was, and is for us too, that focusing solely upon His judgment of sin is so unbalanced as to be a lack of faith.

*Jeremiah 32:37 Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries where I have driven them in My anger, and in My wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely-* Dwelling safely in Jerusalem was a far cry from how things were at that time, with the city besieged. God's message of restoration includes within it a complete recognition of their sins and His resultant, legitimate anger and fury with them. His 'indignance' is all understandable given the extent of His love; for genuine love cannot exist in a vacuum. The abuse of that love is going to provoke anger, otherwise the "love" was not really legitimate and genuine.

*Jeremiah 32:38 and they shall be My people, and I will be their God-* This alludes to the promises to Abraham (Gen. 17:8-10) which were the basis of the new covenant God was now offering His repentant people (:40).

*Jeremiah 32:39 and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for their good, and of their children after them-* As explained on Jer. 31:33, the new covenant involves God doing a psychological miracle on the spirit / heart of men through *His* Spirit being mixed with their spirit. They were still envisaged as having "children after them"; the possibility was that this situation could have arisen for the exiles in a restored Kingdom of God in Israel. Earlier, God had given His people "one heart" to be obedient (2 Chron. 30:12 s.w.). The other reference to having "one heart" is when Judah had one heart to make David their king (1 Chron. 12:38). "David your king" is how the Messianic ruler of the restored kingdom is described (Ez. 37:24). God was willing to give them one heart for him. But they didn't repent, and refused to accept this new covenant. And so it didn't happen; but the essence of the promise has been reapplied to a new Israel who now can enter this same new covenant and receive the same gift of the Spirit, and it will come to its ultimate fulfillment when the Kingdom is fully established on earth at the Lord's return. But for now, the promise of the Spirit, the new heart which makes us fear God for our good, is absolutely real. He will put the fear of Him in our hearts (:40). Israel and Judah had previously taken the same "way", portrayed in metaphor as the way of sexual addiction and adultery against their God (s.w. Ez. 23:13). But now they would be given one way, one worldview, one mindset, which would lead to the things of God's Kingdom. This is not simply a case of confirming a person in the path they choose- it is giving people that heart and way, that mental pathway. All the exiles had to do was be willing to accept it, but they would not do even that. The power of pride and dislike of change was such that they didn't want this new heart and spirit; and that is why people today refuse to accept the movement of the Spirit in their lives.

*Jeremiah 32:40 And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they may not depart from Me-* See on :39. God presents Himself in metaphor as following His people, perhaps alluding to a shepherd following His flock (Am. 7:15). He presents Himself as servile to His own people, so earnestly desirous is He to give us His fear in our hearts and to keep us from departing from Him. This relentless desire of God 'to do us good' is part of what it means to be in the

new covenant with Him. His effort is presented here as being particularly concerning the state of heart of His people. He so wishes us to be spiritually minded, and will work through every issue in our lives night and day in order to achieve this.

*Jeremiah 32:41 Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul-* God solemnly promises "assuredly" that in truth, His whole heart and soul is behind doing His people good and saving them into His reestablished kingdom; see on :40. This is the huge activity operating upon those within the new covenant.

When Israel were so far from God, He foretold the day when "my people will be gorged with my grace" (Jer. 31:14). The image of gorging upon grace is yet another reflection of the super-abounding nature of it. And this part of the new covenant to be made with Israel is true of us today, who have already entered that same covenant; it's a thought we can dwell upon as we eat at the Lord's table. And as we do so we can think of how God describes *His* feelings in all this: "I will find joy in them and in doing them good" (Jer. 32:41). God simply *loves* pouring out such grace. Let's try to catch something of this spirit of the grace of God. Let's try to adopt God's perspective. For what does He require more of a man, "but to do justly, and to *love* mercy (as God does, Mic. 7:18), and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8)?

*Jeremiah 32:42 For thus says Yahweh: Like as I have brought all this great evil on this people, so will I bring on them all the good that I have promised them-* The very phrase "bring... good", translated "good comes", is used in Jer. 17:6 about the unbelieving Jews: "For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when *good comes*, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited". The people who trust the flesh or the world for "good" rather than Yahweh will "not see when good comes". The true good that comes only from Yahweh will not be perceived if we are focused all the time upon the "good" we think we can get from trusting in the flesh. We will not perceive the beauty of a sunrise because we are so caught up in hoping that news of a lottery win is about to come through. Such people stay in the land of condemnation ["a salt land"] by their own choice. And so many of the exiles remain in Babylon, failing to perceive the "good" which was being brought about by the "good hand of God" at the restoration (s.w. Ezra 7:9; 8:18 etc.).

*Jeremiah 32:43 Fields shall be bought in this land-* The power of the incident would have been if the witnesses and Jeremiah saw Jeremiah inhabiting the property he had bought, after the people had been restored to the land. A property then bought dirt cheap during the siege would then be worth so much more, and the power of the prophetic word would have been declared. But the restoration didn't happen as was possible, and he died in exile in Egypt, never receiving the property. He will in some form receive it, therefore, at the resurrection; when like Daniel he will rise to stand in his allotted inheritance (Dan. 12:13). So this incident again serves to demonstrate how much potential was wasted, and the awful human resistance to God's desire to do them good.

*About which you say, It is desolate, without man or animal; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans-* The "you" could refer to Jeremiah, in which case we see him arguing with God, and his words being cited back to him by the God who knows every word and thought. If the "you" refers to the Jews, then we see how on one hand they believed Jeremiah's words about the Chaldean victory, evidence for which was all around them; and yet on the other, they desperately clung to their belief in their idols, hoping against hope that the obvious truth would in fact not be true. This is typical of human nature, and is the sad attitude and belief system which many carry with them to their grave planks.

*Jeremiah 32:44 Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe the deeds, and seal them, and call witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the hill country, and in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South: for I will cause their captivity to return, says Yahweh-* The idea was that this would be the situation in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel which Jeremiah was prophesying. But here we read of buying for money, deeds, witnesses etc. The kingdom which was then possible was still somewhat human; the ultimate restoration of the Kingdom will not feature these things, and so we have to again conclude that the message of a restored kingdom was reapplied, reinterpreted and rescheduled to the last days. And not every detail of the original prophecies will therefore literally come about.

## Jeremiah Chapter 33

*Jeremiah 33:1 Moreover the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard, saying-* It seems that God's answer to Jeremiah's doubts about the restoration in Jer. 32 didn't solve all his questions. And so God gives him another vision of reassurance about restoration. Jeremiah in Jer. 32 had felt that Israel's sins were such that restoration was impossible. God's answer is to take on board completely this concern, but to emphasize the power of His grace. If Jeremiah so struggled to accept the degree of God's grace and power to change hard hearts... we can expect that we will likewise. And so we need the further reassurance of this chapter just as Jeremiah did.

*Jeremiah 33:2 Thus says Yahweh who does it, Yahweh who forms it to establish it; Yahweh is His name-* To not restore Israel, to not save His people, would be akin to having formed / created the world but not establishing it as a realistic abode for His people. The language here is borrowed from Is. 45:18, where also in a restoration context, Israel are encouraged that God formed the earth to be inhabited. If nobody will inhabit that Kingdom, then all creation was but labour in vain. God wants to save, He rejoices in doing so. See on Jer. 32:40,41.

*Jeremiah 33:3 Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will show you great things, and difficult, which you don't know-* This may be a personal invitation to Jeremiah (see on :1). He "knew" the theoretical truth of the restoration, but he had to "know" it personally, even though that realization would be both great and difficult. See on Jer. 32:17,27. Jeremiah was representative of his people; in the restored kingdom, they would call and God would answer (s.w. Is. 58:9; 65:24; Zech. 13:9).

*Jeremiah 33:4 For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are broken down to make a defence against the mounds and against the sword-* Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians (Jer. 52:13), but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls. Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

*Jeremiah 33:5 While men come to fight with the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have killed in My anger and in My wrath-* The great houses were filled with dead bodies; the wealthy homes which were the epitome of their wealth, pride, materialism and unspirituality, became their tombs.

*And for all whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city-* Israel were driven away from God's face / presence because they had already hid themselves from His face by their sins (Is. 59:2; Jer. 32:33 cp. 33:5). "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself" (Hos. 13:9) says it all.

*Jeremiah 33:6 Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them-* The broken earthen bottle which was smashed couldn't be made whole again- apparently (Jer. 19:11). But the miracle of grace was that like the useless burnt vine branch of Ez. 15 and the marred linen girdle buried by the Euphrates, the smashed bottle, like Ezekiel's dry bones vision, could be made whole again. The stripes upon the suffering servant could 'heal' Israel (s.w. "made whole", Is. 53:5). Jeremiah had preached as much, that being made whole again was possible (Jer. 3:22; 30:17; 33:6 s.w.). The rhetorical question of Lam. 2:13 "Zion... who can heal you / make you whole again?" (s.w.) had its answer in Yahweh.

*And I will reveal to them abundance of peace and truth-* This can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah (see on Jer. 29:7). As noted on :1, Jeremiah wondered as to whether God could really psychologically restore such a corrupted people; just as we may wonder whether the Holy Spirit can really heal the hearts of the abused and drug addicted. God is encouraging him that this really could happen; He could and can cure the psychologically incurable.

*Jeremiah 33:7 I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first-* Causing captivity to return can be read as simply meaning 'to revive the fortunes'. But they had been asked to return from exile to Zion, and spiritually, to return to their God. And here God is saying that He will cause them to

return; if they wanted restoration and turning to God, then God would give this to them. Repentance is therefore a gift (Acts 11:18). His causative power operates directly upon the human heart; for this prophecy is a follow on and back up to that of Jer. 32:40.

*Jeremiah 33:8 I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, by which they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, by which they have sinned against Me, and by which they have transgressed against Me- God would give not only repentance (:7) but also forgiveness. But His amazing offer labours the point four times in this verse- that they really had sinned against Him. And that needed to be recognized.*

*Jeremiah 33:9 This city shall be to Me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do to them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to it- The amazing grace of God to His people, giving them both repentance (:7) and forgiveness (:8), would result in a peace with God which would become legendary. All nations of the *eretz*, including those who had abused Israel, would hear and perceive this grace, and come trembling to the God of Jerusalem in order to themselves partake of it. This is what could have happened at the restoration, but it has been reapplied to the last days. Really perceiving this grace is enough indeed to make a man "fear and tremble"; not from fear of condemnation, but in awe at the surpassing grace extended.*

*Jeremiah 33:10 Thus says Yahweh: Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without animal- "Yet again" demonstrates that the new kingdom to be established would be a restoration of the previous kingdom of God in Israel, although to a far grander extent. This is what will happen at the Lord's return to earth (Acts 1:6). There is an element of continuity with the previous kingdom; reminding us that the kingdom of God on earth is to be real and concrete and not purely abstract and immaterial. In Lamentations, Jeremiah laments the desolate state of the streets of Jerusalem; he appeared to have forgotten these wonderful prophecies of restoration, caught up as we can be in the tragedy of the moment.*

*Jeremiah 33:11 The voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever; who bring thanksgiving into the house of Yahweh- In the final restoration of the Kingdom, there will be no marriage (Lk. 20:35,36). So this describes what could have been in the restored Kingdom at the restoration. It didn't happen, and therefore the essence of the prophecies will come true at the Lord's return- but not every detail. The building of the temple, institution of sacrifices etc. of Ez. 40-48 would appear to be another example of some of the literal physicalities intended which will not be literally fulfilled at the Lord's return.*

*For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says Yahweh- We read in Jer. 33:11,26 of God 'causing' the captives to return. The Hebrew in this phrase is intriguing and impossible to adequately translate- the idea is 'I will cause by my very own self and will'. The whole force of God's personality and His passions and emotions was behind His causing Judah to return to the land. But most of them withstood it. And so as we spread the appeal of God to men to return to Him, there is a huge Divine 'will' behind our message, God Himself in all His passion is behind our appeals.*

*Jeremiah 33:12 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Yet again shall there be in this place which is waste, without man and without animal, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down- "Yet again" demonstrates that the new kingdom to be established would be a restoration of the previous kingdom of God in Israel, although to a far grander extent. This is what will happen at the Lord's return to earth (Acts 1:6). There is an element of continuity with the previous kingdom; reminding us that the kingdom of God on earth is to be real and concrete and not purely abstract and immaterial. The idea of farmers and shepherds living within the area of the restored Zion is found in Ez. 48:18 (see notes there). But the commands of Ez. 40-48 weren't obeyed by the returned exiles.*

*Jeremiah 33:13 In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks again pass under the hands of him who numbers them, says Yahweh- See on :12. Ez. 20:37 speaks of the returning exiles as flocks passing*

under the rod of the shepherd, who counts them that none be lost. Verse 22 is a designed contrast; the redeemed as Abraham's seed cannot be numbered. And yet this shepherd, spoken of in the singular because one particular shepherd is in view, will be able to number them. The shepherd is seen as the Messianic priest-ruler; clearly this looks forward to the Lord Jesus, seeing the flock of exiles generally did not truly return.

*Jeremiah 33:14 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will perform that word of grace which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah-* Again it is emphasized that Israel and Judah would unite, due to the common experience of God's grace. To be not only forgiven of so much sin, but even caused to repent (see on :7,8), is indeed a word of grace. No covenant based upon obedience could lead to their restoration; it had to be of grace alone, as it has to be for us too.

*Jeremiah 33:15 In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land-* A branch growing out of David means that this person was the seed of David. Zerubbabel ['branch of God from Babylon'] could have fulfilled all this; but he didn't. The promised seed of David was therefore fulfilled in the Lord Jesus (Lk. 1:35,36). Executing justice and judgment was to be the characteristic of Abraham's seed (the same three words are in Gen. 18:19). The seed of David would be the seed of Abraham. The new covenant would be based upon the promises to Abraham. And yet it is God as judge of all the earth who executes justice (s.w. Gen. 18:25). So this literal descendant of Abraham and David was to be the manifestation of God; all clearly to be fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

*Jeremiah 33:16 In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name by which it shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness-* The effect of the Messianic ruler, the branch of righteousness of :15, will be that Jerusalem (put her for the people of Jerusalem and Judah) would also be known as "Yahweh our righteousness". The "our" refers not to Judah, but to some other group- the Gentile nations around them. As Yahweh had been her righteousness, imputing righteousness to them through the Messianic figure which looked forward to the Lord Jesus, so they would reflect their reconciliation to others. They would become righteousness for others as Yahweh had been their saving righteousness. This is to be our response likewise to what has been done for us by grace in Christ.

All this could have happened at the restoration. As Jerusalem was to be renamed "Yahweh is our righteousness" (Jer. 33:16 RV), so Ez. 48:35 likewise is a command rather than a prediction, that the city should be called this. But Judah didn't do this. The concept has been reapplied to those who call Yahweh's righteousness upon themselves in baptism. Jer. 33:16; 23:6 etc. outline God's intention that after the restoration, the rebuilt Zion would be named "The Lord our righteous one" because Jerusalem would be the habitation of the righteous one (Jer. 31:23; 50:7). This is similar language to the restoration prophecies of Isaiah- the surrounding Gentile world would see / perceive / believe in "the righteous one" who would reign in the rebuilt Zion (Is. 62:2).

*Jeremiah 33:17 For thus says Yahweh: David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel-* This implies that the ruler in the line of David would have children and descendants who would eternally continue reigning on David's throne. That wonderful potential was not realized in Zerubbabel, and so the prophecy will come true in essence in that the Lord Jesus, the seed of David, will reign eternally.

In the context of the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne; and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been "kings sitting for David upon his throne" (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17.

*Jeremiah 33:18 Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, and to burn meal offerings, and to do sacrifice continually-* This again was the potential possibility; the system of offerings was to be restored in the rebuilt temple, and the Levites who served there would have an unbroken line of descendants who continued that work. But they were impenitent; this didn't happen. Therefore Nehemiah was heartbroken that the temple was "forsaken", because the "Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field" because the tithes weren't paid to them (Neh. 13:10,11). The essence of it came to be fulfilled in the eternal

priesthood of the Lord Jesus, but the detail obviously wasn't.

*Jeremiah 33:19 The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying-* It would appear that the fall of Jerusalem and exile meant that there was a feeling that the covenant relationship with God had been broken, and Israel were therefore no longer God's people. Those who fail can at times be so swallowed up with the sorrow of condemnation that they believe there can be no way back for them (2 Cor. 2:7). And so we have here the affirmation of God's eternal faithfulness to Israel.

*Jeremiah 33:20 Thus says Yahweh: If you can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, so that there shall not be day and night in their season-* The whole of creation was bound up with Israel; all of creation came about for our sakes, God's people. All the vastness is merely to provide a context for our redemption. Any breaking of covenant with God's people is therefore tantamount to a breaking of covenant with day and night, and the entire solar system which provides them. There is no record of God having a covenant relationship with those entities; but here we learn that He does, insofar as He has a covenant relationship with His people.

And yet the covenant with Israel was broken, both by them and later confirmed by God from His side (Zech. 11:10). The eternal nature of His covenant is therefore achieved by redefining the human parties; instead of the nation of Israel, the part became "David My servant" (:21), Messiah- and all in Him. The darkness that came down at the crucifixion would have recalled Jer. 33:19-21- when day and night no longer follow their normal sequence, God is breaking His covenant with Israel. Israel's condemnation would be that "even at midday you will grope like a blind man in the dark" (Dt. 28:29). And yet the Lord would have known that He was suffering for Israel, treated as an apostate Israel, and thus He was the more inspired to pray for their ultimate forgiveness and salvation, seeing He had borne their condemnation. The Lord suffered "for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due" (Is. 53:8 RVmg.). There are therefore elements of the crucifixion sufferings of Jesus in every suffering of natural Israel.

*Jeremiah 33:21 Then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne; and with the Levites the priests, My ministers-* The old covenant was broken (Zech. 11:10). But the kingly and priestly lines did not continue after the restoration. As explained on :20, the covenant was only unbroken in that the human party was redefined, from Israel as a nation to a singular king-priest who would be their representative- ultimately, the Lord Jesus. All those in Him would abide within the covenant, eternally.

*Jeremiah 33:22 As the army of the sky can't be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David My servant, and the Levites who minister to Me-* Verse 13 and Ez. 20:37 speaks of the returning exiles as flocks passing under the rod of the shepherd, who counts them that none be lost. Here there is a designed contrast; the redeemed as Abraham's seed cannot be numbered. And yet this shepherd, spoken of in the singular because one particular shepherd is in view, will be able to number them. The shepherd is seen as the Messianic priest-ruler; clearly this looks forward to the Lord Jesus, seeing the flock of exiles generally did not truly return. The seed of David was to multiply as the seed of Abraham; and it would be achieved as explained on :21, through the Messianic king-priest, the Lord Jesus, in whom all baptized into Him would also become part of this multitude of king-priests. But this far grander eventuality was only to come about because the possibility of fulfillment at the restoration didn't happen, because the line of David and the Levites precluded it.

*Jeremiah 33:23 The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying-* The assurance which follows may have been given in answer to some specific question from the audience, or may be addressing some personal question of Jeremiah. The specific objection is stated in :34.

*Jeremiah 33:24 Don't consider what this people has spoken saying, The two families which Yahweh chose, has He not cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them-* The people of Judah appeared to think that now they had been treated like the ten tribes and sent into captivity, they like the ten tribes would be permanently rejected it. Judah had fed themselves with the elitist narrative that the exile of the ten tribes meant they were no longer the true people of God, whereas they as Judah had the temple with them, had not gone into exile, and were therefore God's true people. But now they too had gone into exile. This is the problem of

being harshly judgmental of others; those who are such often then discover that they have actually committed the same sins as those they once so harshly judge. And their response is often to walk away from the things of God because they think that they too are condemned beyond redemption. And so Judah despised themselves now they too were carried away into exile and had lost the temple; considering they could never again be Yahweh's people. In this context comes the message of restoration, possible for those who believed in it.

*Jeremiah 33:25 Thus says Yahweh: If My covenant of day and night fails, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth-* The whole of creation was bound up with Israel; all of creation came about for our sakes, God's people. All the vastness is merely to provide a context for our redemption. Any breaking of covenant with God's people is therefore tantamount to a breaking of covenant with day and night, and the entire solar system which provides them. There is no record of God having a covenant relationship with those entities; but here we learn that He does, insofar as He has a covenant relationship with His people.

*Jeremiah 33:26 Then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them-* See on :11. One understanding of this would be that Yahweh 'cast away' Judah (Jer. 12:7; 23:33) but only because they had cast Him off (Jer. 15:6 s.w.); and yet He did not cast off His people in that the seed of Jacob was to be redefined- not as a nation, but as His great individual seed, Jesus, and all those baptized into Him. And yet perhaps here we again have the paradox of grace. God did not cast off His people (Jer. 33:26); Jeremiah personally was persuaded that God would not cast off His people for ever (Lam. 3:31). He will show them mercy as if He had not cast them off (Zech. 10:6); this reversal of their casting off was to be through the repentance of the exiled community (Lev. 26:44). But even this didn't happen, and yet God still did not cast them away (Rom. 11:2). His love and grace was such that He holds on to them. This desperate holding on to His people is seen in the experience of every person who joins God's people through baptism into Christ. They may indeed be cast off ultimately, but that is because they cast Him off, and wrestled against His insistent desire to keep hold of them eternally.

## Jeremiah Chapter 34

*Jeremiah 34:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army and all the kingdoms of the land that were under his dominion, and all the peoples, were fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of it, saying-* The emphasis is upon how indeed all nations of the lands around Israel came to fight against Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 34:2 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Go speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire-* This was surely a conditional prophecy, even though no condition is given at the time: "I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire". But the Jews made some sort of repentance, releasing their slaves... and the Babylonian armies retreated (Jer. 34:21,22). Then they enslaved their brethren again- and, v.22 says, only because of this did the Babylonian armies return and burn Jerusalem. Thus the initial prophecy of burning with fire was conditional. And the Jews realized this and therefore repented. In similar vein, "the king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land" was capable of not being fulfilled, if Judah would only have repented (Jer. 36:3,7,29).

*Jeremiah 34:3 and you shall not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth, and you shall go to Babylon-* This was still conditional; Zedekiah could have repented. It was because he did not humble himself before the words of Jeremiah that the destruction and exile happened (2 Chron. 36:12-17). Zedekiah did see the eyes of the king, but his eyes were then put out. But it seems that in his blindness he repented to some degree.

*Jeremiah 34:4 Yet hear the word of Yahweh, O Zedekiah king of Judah: thus says Yahweh concerning you, You shall not die by the sword-* This was the previous judgment upon Zedekiah and the royal family (specifically :20; Jer. 21:7,9; also Jer. 9:16; 15:9; 20:4; 24:10). The idea may be that if he repented, a different destiny was possible. And indeed, he died in peace, albeit blind and in exile. We can conclude therefore that in the blindness and imprisonment he experienced, he did repent. Blindness was used as a spur to repentance in the lives of Saul, Elymas and others.

*Jeremiah 34:5 You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord! Because I have spoken the word, says Yahweh-* Previously, the fate of Zedekiah was to have been the consuming of his carcass in shame (Jer. 19:7). As noted on :4, the Divine intentions for Zedekiah were changed because of his later repentance. The prophecy here mentions no conditions. But consider the words of Ez. 12:13 about the same man: "My net also will I spread upon him, and he shall be taken in my snare: and I will bring him to Babylon...yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there" [i.e. he would be made blind before arrival]. The surrounding verses give an accurate prophecy of how Zedekiah was captured whilst fleeing from Jerusalem. And the same is said in Jer. 32:4; 38:17. It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely). See on :20.

*Jeremiah 34:6 Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem-* Given the power of Zedekiah against people like Jeremiah, this was spoken with great bravery, that was motivated by a real desire to see his repentance.

*Jeremiah 34:7 when the king of Babylon's army was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities-* "Remained" is the word for "remnant". It is this "remnant" which could have repented and been saved. The rest of Judah had fallen apart from them. We constantly encounter all the potential salvations that were possible.

*Jeremiah 34:8 The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them-* God's response to this covenant was to speak of His own covenant with Israel (:13). His covenant relationship with them was conditional upon their covenant

attitude to each other; and that is an abiding principle. Relationship with God depends upon our relationship and attitude to each other; as John puts it, we cannot claim to love God without loving our brother. This is why attitude to others within the covenant is so critically important, as upon that our whole relationship with God may stand or fall. It was apparently a jubilee year, when the slaves should in any case be released. This explains why they had a choice; to give the land and people rest, or to allow the land and common people to "keep Sabbath" in the desolation and exile which would happen after the invasion.

*Jeremiah 34:9 that every man should let his male servant, and every man his female servant, who is a Hebrew or a Hebrewess, go free; that none should make bond servants of them, of a Jew his brother-* Heb. 'should work through them', i.e. "should employ them for forced labour". It was on the back of this kind of abuse that the wealthy had built their great houses in Jerusalem. They were supposed to release them anyway in the Sabbath year, and that year was a jubilee year as well (:17). If they enslaved their brethren, then they were to be enslaved by the Babylonians. If they liberated their brethren, then they would be liberated from otherwise certain bondage (Jer. 30:8 uses the same language). Again we must perceive the point- that abuse of our brethren will lead to our condemnation. Our attitude to those weaker than ourselves is so critically important; it is upon this that our relationship with God depends. In the light of this, we must carefully reassess any policies of disfellowship which our church, fellowship or denomination demands us to uphold. As we have been called to freedom, our attitude to our brethren should be seeking to liberate them, rather than enslave them. The tragedy is that at the restoration, these abusive practices were revived (Neh. 5:5), when it was exactly because of them that Judah had gone into captivity.

*Jeremiah 34:10 All the princes and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant, that everyone should let his male servant and everyone his female servant, go free, that none should make bond servants of them any more; they obeyed, and let them go-* All those obeyed who had entered the covenant; which might suggest some didn't even enter it. A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

*Jeremiah 34:11 but afterwards they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids-* Note the play on the word "return". By making their servants 'return' to bondage, they were 'returning' to the bondage of sin and selfishness. And this example is so true to our lives- we can forgive a person at one point in time, or in some way 'release' them; but find it impossible to maintain that intensity, just as David failed with Shimei.

There was a clear commandment to release their bondservants in the Sabbath year (Ex. 21:2; Dt. 15:12). But these slaves had likely sold themselves into that bondage. And with Jerusalem consumed by plague, famine and the effects of the Babylonian siege, these people had no choice but to immediately sell themselves back into that slavery. Technically, it could be argued that the wealthier Jews had done nothing wrong. But clearly they had disobeyed the spirit of the law- that their brethren should not be in permanent bondage to them, but should be given the freedom which is intended for every human being. This keeping the letter of the law but breaking the spirit of it was deeply abhorrent to God; and so they are condemned for doing so. We cannot adopt a spirit of brinkmanship with God; rather are we to wholeheartedly follow the way of love, kindness, sensitivity and empathy.

The prophets not only reflected God's dismay and passionate feelings, they expressed their own dismay too. Lack of justice was a major concern of the prophets. But to us, injustice may be so commonplace we don't really worry about it too much. Given all the idolatry going on at the time of Jeremiah, we'd have expected the condition for being spared judgment at the hands of their invaders to be: "Throw your idols away!". But here God had offered them a reprieve if they stopped abusing their brethren. When, temporarily, the Jews ceased doing that and proclaimed liberty to their brethren- the pending judgment was put on hold. When they again abused their brethren, not giving them the "liberty" which must be afforded to all those made in God's image, then the Babylonians returned. And we need to ask whether we proclaim liberty to our brethren- or abuse them by not allowing them the basic freedom which is the dignity God allows to each of His children. It's rather like Paul writing to the Corinthians, and firstly

addressing the sin of their divisiveness. What about their drunkenness at the breaking of bread, false doctrine, idolatry, using temple prostitutes? Paul focuses firstly on the sin of their divisions.

*Jeremiah 34:12 Therefore the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* As noted on :11, what the wealthy had done was technically within the limits of the law, but was such an obvious abuse of it that God responds very sternly.

*Jeremiah 34:13 Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying-* God's covenant with His people at this point was dependent upon their abiding by the covenant agreement to not abuse and rather liberate their brethren. Accepting covenant relationship with God involves a solemn understanding that we are not to abuse the weak, but are to do to them as God has done with us. We are to take them out of bondage, not into it. And we can return people to bondage by guilt tripping them and places burdens upon them.

*Jeremiah 34:14 At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother who is a Hebrew, who has been sold to you, and has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you: but your fathers didn't listen to Me-* Serving six years was counted inclusively as serving to the end of seven years. There was to be a generosity of spirit in dealing with their brethren.

*Neither inclined their ear-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Jeremiah 34:15 You had now turned, and had done that which is right in My eyes, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name-* They turned in repentance, and then turned back (:16). The turning of their captivity was to be response to their final turning back to God; the idea of 'turning' / repenting is such a major theme in Jeremiah. For all their sins of rebellion and idolatry, the threatened judgment could have been turned away simply if they repented of this one thing. This highlights how critically important is love for our brethren, and not seeking to get out of our responsibilities to the weak by claiming technical obedience to Divine law. For this was just what they were doing- capitalizing on their brethren's poverty by letting them sell themselves to them as slaves, abusing their services, and then technically releasing them but letting these poor people sell themselves back into slavery to them soon afterwards.

*Jeremiah 34:16 but you turned and profaned My name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom you had let go free at their pleasure, to return; and you brought them into subjection, to be to you for servants and for handmaids-* God's Name has within it the ideas of salvation, redemption and liberation of His people. To act contrary to that is to profane His Name. This is the essence of blasphemy. God will not let His Name be polluted by His people (Is. 48:11; Ez. 20:9). But they did pollute His Name (Jer. 34:16), and the restored exiles did just the same rather than learn any lesson (Mal. 1:7). God invites us to see His efforts to stop His Name being polluted as somehow defeated by the extent of Israel's pollutions. This theme comes out clearly in Ezekiel: they polluted Him, but He strove lest His Name should be polluted. Here is the extent of freewill which God gives man to sin- and also the extent of the hopefulness of God. It's as if He didn't imagine they would pollute Him as much as they did.

*Jeremiah 34:17 Therefore thus says Yahweh: you have not listened to Me, to proclaim liberty each man to his brother and each man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim to you a liberty, says Yahweh, to the sword, to the plague and to the famine-* The play upon 'proclaiming liberty' has more appropriacy when we appreciate that this was a Sabbath and jubilee year. There is definite allusion to the prophecy of Is. 61:1, that the reestablished Messianic kingdom would be heralded by a proclamation of liberty to the captives; the same Hebrew phrase is used. Jeremiah's proclamation of this liberty was therefore a foretaste of that; if the Jews had accepted it and themselves proclaimed

it, then despite all their other weaknesses, the most amazing turnaround could have happened. They who were on the brink of miserable destruction and condemnation could have been transformed into the restored Kingdom of God. The liberty was proclaimed to them. But instead they preferred petty power over others; their short term selfishness was too great, and the most wonderful, eternal opportunity was missed. They refused to accept their weaker, poorer brethren as their neighbours and equal brothers. And so it is with people to this day.

*And I will make you to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth-* This removing / tossing to and from of Judah from their land uses the same word as in Dt. 28:25; in response to their breaking of the covenant, they would be "removed (s.w.) into all the kingdoms of the *eretz*, throughout the land promised to Abraham. But this curse could have been turned into a blessing; for the restoration prophets envisaged the nations of the *eretz* repenting and converting to Yahweh. This could have been achieved by the exiles witnessing to the various peoples and languages within the Babylonian / Persian empire. But this didn't happen as was potentially possible. The exiles didn't repent, and so their repentance and experience of the grace of forgiveness was not the powerful pattern of conversion to their neighbours which it could have been.

*Jeremiah 34:18 I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts-* The covenant in view seems specifically the covenant to release the slaves (:8). A calf was cut in two, representing how they would be cut in pieces if they failed to keep it. This contrasts with the new covenant, which was based upon the promises to Abraham. As noted on Gen. 15, this was a unilateral covenant from God to man. Yahweh alone passed through the pieces, whereas Abraham remained powerless to do so. He was simply the recipient of grace. The old covenant in the law of Moses was different; it depended upon the human side keeping their part of the agreement. It seems that now, at this dire point, God was willing to retain Israel within the covenant, even though they had broken it- if they kept their side of it, in simply liberating their brethren and not abusing them. But they failed to do even that, and so they were to be cut to pieces. But in grace, even that didn't happen to them all. For many of them went into exile rather than being slain with the sword, and as noted on Jer. 33, Zedekiah died in peace rather than be cut in pieces.

*Jeremiah 34:19 the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf-* As explained on :18, this meant that they were to be cut into parts, seeing they had broken the covenant. They of course would have argued that they didn't break the covenant; they had freed their slaves, but the slaves being in desperate straits had sold themselves back to them for another six years soon afterwards. But they were breaking thereby the obvious spirit of the law, and this was counted as having broken the covenant agreement made, to liberate their brethren.

*Jeremiah 34:20 I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for food to the birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth-* The covenant of Gen. 15 featured the passing between the pieces, with birds of prey eager to come and eat the pieces of the slain calf. They had broken the covenant and were to be treated likewise. As explained on :19, they would have argued that they hadn't broken the covenant in the letter; but they had in spirit. And so they were to be cut in pieces and eaten by wild animals, with no decent burial. All because they refused to liberate their brethren. But did this really happen to them? The impression is given that the royal family went into exile and Zedekiah himself died in peace. Here again we would then see God in wrath remembering mercy, such was His grace.

*Jeremiah 34:21 Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army who have for now gone away from you-* To be given into the hand / power of those who want to kill you is surely tantamount to saying that they will kill you. As explained on :4,5, this was initially the prophetic scenario for Zedekiah; he would die by the sword. But by grace this was changed; he didn't repent at that time when he was intended to, and yet he presumably did later, after he was blinded and imprisoned.

*Jeremiah 34:22 Behold, I will command, says Yahweh, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant-* The 'return' of Judah to the sin of abusing their brethren, even despite doing so technically in the name of casuistic obedience to the law, was what caused the Babylonians to return. God placed such huge significance upon their

attitude to their brethren; to the point that He effectively makes the entire return of the Babylonians to destroy the city and temple to pivot upon this matter.

## Jeremiah Chapter 35

*Jeremiah 35:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying-* The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically, but perhaps thematically. For this follows on from the theme of disobedience in Jer. 34.

*Jeremiah 35:2 Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak to them, and bring them into the house of Yahweh, into one of the rooms, and give them wine to drink-* The Rechabites were a wandering tribe descended from the Kenites (1 Chron. 2:55; Jud. 1:16). Being given wine to drink by a prophet was a symbol of judgment. They refused to drink it because of their obedience to principle. Whilst judgment cannot be avoided, perhaps the idea is that people could be saved from judgment because of obedience- which is the context provided by the previous chapter (see on :1).

*Jeremiah 35:3 Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, all his sons and the whole family of the Rechabites-* These three names all include the name "Yah". These wandering Gentiles (see on :2) had clearly accepted the Jewish faith and Yahweh as their God. If "the whole family" were brought into the temple for this occasion, they may not have been that numerous; they had all fled into Jerusalem for fear of the Babylonians.

*Jeremiah 35:4 and I brought them into the house of Yahweh, into the room of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaliah, the man of God-* If as AV "a man of God", this may be a comment upon his spirituality. He would have been one of a very small remnant of faithful priests.

*Which was by the room of the princes-* The rooms around the temple were intended for the priests. But they were in coalition with the princes, and so the princes had some of the Levites' chambers in the temple.

*Which was above the room of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the threshold-* This may have been the Maaseiah of Jer. 21:1; 29:25; 37:3; 52:4, who was one of the "priests" who were generally condemned and judged. The temple was used for this object lesson in order to make a public witness to the priests and princes.

*Jeremiah 35:5 I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine and cups; and I said to them, Drink wine!-* The Hebrew for "bowls" is mainly used about the "bowls" of the candlestick. Perhaps abuse of alcohol had become part of the general apostasy and idolatry going on in the temple.

*Jeremiah 35:6 But they said, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying, You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons, forever-* "Our father" doesn't have to mean that the "Rechabites" were his literal descendants; they may have been attracted to this ascetic lifestyle and considered themselves the spiritual descendants of Jonadab.

*Jeremiah 35:7 neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant a vineyard nor own one; but all your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land in which you live-* Houses, fields and lands could legitimately be bought and sold, and would be in the restored kingdom (Jer. 32:15). It seems the connection with this verse is intentional. The point could be that these people were obedient to principles which were not strictly correct, they were not kingdom principles; and God's people can take a lesson from those who are fiercely loyal to principles which aren't correct. For how much stronger should be our loyalty and obedience to that which is ultimately true. "If they can do *that for that*, then how much more should I..." give my best for His highest.

*Jeremiah 35:8 We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters-* Drinking wine was in fact one of the covenant blessings. The command not to drink wine was therefore out of step with God's kingdom principles; as noted too on :7. And yet despite the fact that the Rechabites 'got it wrong' in their understanding of things, their names openly reflect their commitment to Yahweh (see on :3) and despite their misplaced idealism and faulty understanding, God accepted that and held them up as an example to those of His people who were merely living according to the flesh.

*Jeremiah 35:9 nor to build houses for us to dwell in; neither do we have vineyard, nor field, nor seed-* It could be that these commands about vineyard and seed refer specifically to seeds of the vine, as if this strange situation arose from a desire to be Nazirites, but it became twisted into a tradition and formalism which they blindly adhered to. As noted on :8, the Rechabites come over as a case of misplaced idealism, and yet they are commended. We conclude therefore that intellectual purity of understanding is not utterly critical to acceptability with God.

*Jeremiah 35:10 but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us-* The phrase for "obeyed and done" is that used of Israel's obedience to the commandments of God in the old covenant (Dt. 6:3; 7:12 and often). The Rechabites are being held up as an example of how Israel ought to have kept their Heavenly Father's commandments. They didn't do so because they failed to grasp that He really was their Father and they had responsibility to Him which arose from a sense of personal family loyalty.

*Jeremiah 35:11 But it happened, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land, that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians; so we dwell at Jerusalem-* They were forced by the invasion to break some of their covenant loyalty; perhaps to make them reflect that the laws they were keeping were not in fact so important. They were driven into Jerusalem as the invasion was designed to drive the Jews to God.

*Jeremiah 35:12 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying-* The lesson of the Rechabites was not just to be for those gathered in the temple at that time, but to be spread throughout the community (:13).

*Jeremiah 35:13 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Go, and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction to listen to My words? says Yahweh-* This is not quite the same as saying "Will you not listen to My words". It was through receiving instruction that they would listen to or be obedient to God's words. The same phrase is translated "receive correction" (Jer. 2:30). The invasion was designed to correct them and make them sensitive and obedient to God's words; but they like us at times refused that education. We see here how God doesn't simply give commandments and waits for obedience to them. He takes the initiative in seeking to give stimulus for that obedience. In this sense He gives repentance, and not simply forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26; 11:18).

*Jeremiah 35:14 The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; and to this day they drink none, for they obey their father's commandment: but I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; and you have not listened to Me-* The Rechabites wouldn't drink wine nor live in cities, just because they respected the commands of their ancestor about these matters. Yet Yahweh God of Israel had been rising up early, sending His prophets, pleading with Israel to hear. And His people didn't take Him seriously at all. If the sons of Rechab could live as they did, based on their obedience to human words and traditions, why couldn't Israel even more so when it came to God's word? And so with us. There are communities which blindly follow the faith of their fathers, obedient to their traditions and demands regarding, e.g., whom they marry. If men and women can be so obedient to the word of men... shouldn't the word of God, black print on white paper that it is, but nonetheless the same word that made Moses tremble and that Sinai ablaze, have an even deeper impact and more insistent imperative in our lives?

*Jeremiah 35:15 I have sent also to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return now every man from his evil way-* The prophetic word was not generic, it had a way of appealing to every hearer individually.

*And amend your doings, and don't go after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers-* Even when Jerusalem was about to fall to the besiegers, there was still the possibility that they could remain in the land- if they repented and humbled themselves before God's word.

*But you have not inclined your ear, nor listened to Me-* Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our

understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Jeremiah 35:16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to Me- Just as in Jer. 34 the whole purpose of God in destroying Judah could have been changed had they stopped abusing their servants, so here too there was a single challenge given- to accept that they hadn't obeyed their God as the Rechabites had obeyed their fathers. But they refused to humble themselves to realize that.*

*Jeremiah 35:17 therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them, but they have not heard; and I have called to them, but they have not answered-* "Heard" has the idea of 'understanding'. God expects us to understand much more than we think He does. Thus He condemned Israel in Jeremiah's time because He had spoken to them but they had not understood, and therefore they had not responded. They heard the word, as we read it, but they didn't really hear His voice. They thought that getting to grips with God's word was just for those who were into that kind of thing; with the result that God rejected them. The evil was pronounced, but in the gap between the statement and the fulfillment of it, they could have repented and changed the outcome; the evil would not then have happened. The pronouncement of judgment was not therefore stated simply in Divine anger; it was His calling to them. And yet they would not answer.

*Jeremiah 35:18 Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he commanded you-* The blessing was that they would eternally have their family members standing before God in the priesthood (:19). And yet the priesthood ended, and the children of Jonadab didn't eternally "stand before Me". So we can conclude that the idea here is that if they continued obeying their father, then God would count that as obedience to Him, and they would continue standing before Him. I noted above that the commandments given by Jonadab were not completely correct and were based upon misunderstandings. But God was eager that they continued keeping them. It's as if they had misplaced ideals and miseducated conscience; but God commended them for respecting that conscience, and encourages them to continue in it. We would perhaps have expected Him to correct them on an intellectual level, and redirect their zeal towards keeping His commandments rather than Jonadab's. But as with many folks today, it seems God accepts their intellectual failure on some points, and is glad they live in good conscience before Him within the limits of their understanding, even if there is a degree of misconception within that understanding.

*Jeremiah 35:19 therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me forever-* See on :18. This didn't actually happen, because they didn't continue upholding the precepts of their father. And the priesthood was ended.

## Jeremiah Chapter 36

*Jeremiah 36:1 It happened in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying-* Perhaps this was at the end of the fourth year of the reign, just before the fast at the beginning of the fifth year was proclaimed (:9). Judah were still relatively prosperous at this time. This was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar; and so the events of this chapter come to a climax in the proclamation in :29 that this new king was to destroy Judah.

*Jeremiah 36:2 Take a scroll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and against Judah and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day-* Jeremiah's words were to Israel as well as Judah in that it was God's intention they should also repent, and join with Judah in a reestablished Kingdom of God in Israel on the basis of a new covenant. However LXX reads "Jerusalem" for "Israel". The idea was that others would read and re-read these words.

*Jeremiah 36:3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin-* The evil purposed need not have come about- if they repented. The "purpose" of God is therefore open ended and sensitive to human repentance. This verse would be a parade example of it. Jer. 18:8; 26:3 use the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them".

*Jeremiah 36:4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh, which He had spoken to him, on a scroll of a book-* This usage of Baruch could have been because Jeremiah was illiterate; or because Jeremiah's current situation meant that the work of writing out a scroll was impossible for him.

*Jeremiah 36:5 Jeremiah commanded Baruch saying, I am shut up; I can't go into the house of Yahweh-* There is no mention that Jeremiah was imprisoned, although he may have been (s.w. Jer. 33:1; 39:15). The same word is used of Doeg being "detained before the Lord" (1 Sam. 21:7). Perhaps Jeremiah was unclean, or even under some rebuke from Yahweh which precluded his entry to the temple. The idea is that he was "unable" (s.w. 2 Chron. 2:6). He has used the word to describe how God's word was "shut up" within him and he had to as it were release it by speaking it (Jer. 20:9).

*Jeremiah 36:6 therefore you go, and read in the scroll, which you have written from my mouth, the words of Yahweh in the ears of the people in Yahweh's house on the fast day; and also you shall read them in the ears of all Judah who come out of their cities-* "The fasting day" may refer to the day of atonement, the only day of fasting required by the law. This would have been the most appropriate time to call for radical repentance.

*Jeremiah 36:7 It may be they will present their supplication before Yahweh, and will return each one from his evil way; for great is the anger and the wrath that Yahweh has pronounced against this people-* As often in the prophets, the appeal is to the individual- "each one..." (as in :3). The day of atonement was not to be some mere collective ritual; the breaking of bread service likewise can slip into this. It was intended to elicit personal repentance from each individual. No collective ritual could change things; only individual repentance. See on :16.

*Jeremiah 36:8 Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of Yahweh in Yahweh's house-* This was no mere secretarial task; for the appeal to repentance and message of condemnation would have been received with anger by many, and the natural reaction would have been to shoot the messenger.

*Jeremiah 36:9 Now it happened in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that all the people in Jerusalem, and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem, proclaimed a fast before Yahweh-* The LXX has "the eighth year" which would better fit the events of 2 Kings 24:1-20. It could be that this special fast was proclaimed after news came through of the Babylonian defeat of the Egyptian army, which

the Jews had always relied upon rather than trusting in Yahweh. We noted on :6 that Jeremiah's previous appeal had been made on the fasting day of the day of atonement. But clearly the fasting had not been unto repentance; and now another fast is proclaimed. The collective ritual of that day had remained at the level of mere religion, just as the breaking of bread service can; and so now another fast was proclaimed, outside of the Mosaic law; for the day of atonement was in the seventh month not the ninth month (Lev. 16:29). Although it may be that Babylonian months are being used here.

*Jeremiah 36:10 Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh, in the room of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the new gate of Yahweh's house, in the ears of all the people-* As explained on :9, this was the same book which had been read some months previously at the day of atonement. It was an attempt to get Israel to keep the spirit of that day although on a different date and apparently without the sacrifices- in the hope they would perceive the essential intention of the ritual, which was personal repentance. God may likewise move in the lives of His people to help them to the same position.

*Jeremiah 36:11 When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of Yahweh-* Micaiah responds to the challenge of the words, and perceives the urgent need for national repentance. But he had heard these words delivered by Jeremiah over time, and presumably had heard them recited quite recently in :6-8. But as with us, the same words may be heard or read, but only at another reading does the personal reality of them strike home. Micaiah's response here is absolutely psychologically credible and imaginable.

*Jeremiah 36:12 he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's room: and behold, all the princes were sitting there, Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes-* See on :11. We may wonder why they were sitting in the room of the scribe. The reference may be to some senior scribe who was effectively the secretary of the Government; some manuscripts read "Elishama the scribe" (see :20). But the scribe in view may also be Baruch; as if they were there expecting to also hear Baruch's words from Jeremiah but in a private sitting. We at least get the impression that "the princes" were interested in hearing God's word. See on :14.

*Jeremiah 36:13 Then Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people-* We note the second and third hand nature of all this. Jeremiah spoke the original words of Yahweh, and Baruch wrote them down faithfully. Micaiah heard them and told the princes; the princes then attempt to tell their version of them to Zedekiah. But he then calls for the scroll itself, and destroys it. It's as if the record is careful to answer any objection that the truths of God's word got lost in transmission. The king is presented as without excuse.

*Jeremiah 36:14 Therefore all the princes-* A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

*Sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, Take in your hand the scroll in which you have read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand, and came to them-* "Cushi" was likely not a real personal name, but a reference to the fact that this man Jehudi [a form of 'Judah' or as we might say, 'the Jew'] was descended from a Cushite. We recall how later it would be Ebedmelech the Cushite who saved Jeremiah from the dungeon. Perhaps the impression is being given that those of Gentile descent were more responsive to God's word than the Jews. The continual attempts by Judah to trust in Egypt rather than Yahweh over the years may have resulted in these Cushites coming to live in Jerusalem. And yet the result of that weakness on Judah's part was that some Gentiles turned to Yahweh. God always works through human failure rather than turn away in disgust and disengagement from the situation.

*Jeremiah 36:15 They said to him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears-* The

invitation to "sit down" suggests he stood there uncertain as to whether they would wish to hear him read it to them. But they ask him to; see on :14.

*Jeremiah 36:16 Now it happened, when they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one towards another, and said to Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words-* See on :14. However, although their response was commendable, they perhaps failed to perceive that this was a call to personal repentance; see on :7. They immediately experienced group think; they assumed that the decision to repent must be taken on a group level, and so they were desirous for the king to hear the words and proclaim a group position. But as made explicit in :3 and :7, the call to repentance was specifically personal. This confusion of personal and corporate positions is so often seen in the living and thinking of those who are more strongly religious than they are spiritual.

*Jeremiah 36:17 They asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How did you write all these words at his mouth?-* As explained on :16, they were sensitive to the need for repentance, but were shying away from the personal challenge. And that desire to not let God's word personally "bite" is perhaps also reflected in their questioning, after some time had passed, as to whether this word they had heard was really Jeremiah's inspired word. The questioning of inspiration is likewise rooted in a desire not to hear God's word making radical demands of us.

*Jeremiah 36:18 Then Baruch answered them, he pronounced all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book-* See on :17. The idea is that he wrote down the words immediately Jeremiah spoke them. Baruch assures them that it was an accurate transcript with nothing of his own added in.

*Jeremiah 36:19 Then the princes said to Baruch, Go, hide, you and Jeremiah; and let no man know where you are-* Perhaps the princes doubtless had in mind the fate of Uriah (Jer. 26:23). The suggested hiding place was the "Grotto of Jeremiah" near the "Quarries of Solomon" outside the Damascus Gate. See on :26.

*Jeremiah 36:20 They went in to the king into the court; but they had laid up the scroll in the room of Elishama the scribe; and they told all the words in the ears of the king-* They wished to make a public separation between themselves and the scroll, even though the words had touched their consciences. They intended to give the king a potted and perhaps ameliorated version, in the hope the king might make some surface level reforms in response.

*Jeremiah 36:21 So the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll; and he took it out of the room of Elishama the scribe. Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes who stood beside the king-* The events are described slowly and deliberately because of the gravity of the blasphemy which was to follow, and the consequences of it. The princes and courtiers heard the same word, and were therefore responsible for not responding to it.

*Jeremiah 36:22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire in the brazier burning before him-* "The ninth month" seems to add nothing, and the LXX omits it. However the idea may be that the ninth month was a time of cold and rain (Ezra 10:9). The winter house was likely just the downstairs of his palace; the summer house was the upstairs, and not necessarily a separate building. Again we note the high level of detail in this record; not just the fire but the brazier is noted. It's as if the cameraman has zoomed in on the scene and is recording all the details, that we might imagine it. All the king did was to be done to Jerusalem; for the city was to become a brazier when the Babylonians judged it with fire.

*Jeremiah 36:23 It happened, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, that the king cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier-* "Leaves" is literally 'columns' or 'doors', which is what the sections of text looked like on the scroll. Cutting them was what was to be done to the columns and doors of the temple and the king's house. Our attitude to God's word will be directly reflected in our final judgment. The pen knife was Baruch's, and was probably attached to the scroll as part of his scribal equipment. The consciousness of the king's actions is laboured- he took the pen knife out of the scroll and used what was intended to sharpen the pen / word of God, and used it to destroy that word.

*Until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier-* He cut every "three or four leaves" and threw

them into the fire, until the scroll was no more. We have the impression of a conscious act of slow, deliberate attempt to destroy God's word because he didn't like the message. This is why the Bible text has been so attacked, suppressed, physically destroyed, mocked and challenged by false claims- because the message hits home too hard in the subconscious. No other collection of documents has suffered the same extensive campaign against it- because there is nothing like God's word to pierce and challenge the conscience.

*Jeremiah 36:24 They were not afraid, nor tore their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words-* The king's actions were slow and deliberate; every three or four leaves were cut out of the scroll and burnt, and the onlookers would have watched the flames quickly devouring them. There is a time to speak out, and this was such a time. All present are condemned for saying nothing, for making no sign of grief for what was being done to God's word. Although "the princes" aren't mentioned here, as a nod to their conscience toward the word of God (see on :14,25), they were in the end condemned for their attitude. This is typical of how sins of omission are counted by God as sins of commission. Silence is indeed culpable in situations like this. The sin of silence remains an abiding lesson for us of all generations.

*Jeremiah 36:25 Moreover Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the scroll; but he would not hear them-* Three of the five princes listed in :12 are mentioned by name as making this protest. Their protest was noted by God in the record; but their failure to tear their clothes is also noted (:24). They were touched in their conscience by God's word; but finally the sin of silence, despite their slight protest, was counted against them. Such was the nature of the blasphemy.

*Jeremiah 36:26 The king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; but Yahweh hid them-* They had been advised to hide (see on :19), but apparently they had not done so. They were unashamed of God's word and the consequences for declaring it. And God looked after them. The hiding of these prophets recalls the hiding of the true prophets at the time of Ahab; the king is being set up as Ahab.

*Jeremiah 36:27 Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying-* This word presumably came to Jeremiah whilst in hiding (:26). The record labours the sin- the scroll was burnt, namely ["and" serves to introduce a parallel statement here] the words of God.

*Jeremiah 36:28 Take again another scroll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned-* This recalls how the wooden yoke of Jeremiah was broken by those who resisted that prophetic word, and was replaced by a yoke of iron (Jer. 28:13). God's word and the purpose reflected in it cannot be destroyed by shooting the messenger or burning Bibles. But if that is attempted, then the judgment is only increased.

*Jeremiah 36:29 Concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: You have burned this scroll saying, Why have you written therein saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from there man and beast?-* This was in the first year of Nebuchadnezzar (see on :1); and so the events of this chapter come to a climax in the proclamation in :29 that this new king was to destroy Judah. There was a studied refusal to believe that these words were from God. The accusation was that Baruch and Jeremiah had written these things; when they were transmitting God's word and not their own. In essence, this kind of thing continues to this day, no matter how it has been made intellectually respectable; God's words and His challenges to human conscience are passed off as merely the words of men.

The statements that the Babylonians would "certainly" destroy the land were all the same conditional prophecy, even though no condition is given at the time. But the Jews made some sort of repentance, releasing their slaves... and the Babylonian armies retreated (Jer. 34:21,22). Then they enslaved their brethren again- and, Jer. 34:22 says, only because of this did the Babylonian armies return and burn Jerusalem. Thus the initial prophecies of burning with fire which were repeated here, were conditional. And the Jews realized this and therefore repented.

*Jeremiah 36:30 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost-* At the restoration from Babylon, David would never want a man to sit upon his throne (Jer. 33:17); and no conditions to this are specified. And yet even within Jeremiah it is apparent that because of the failure of Judah's leaders, there would indeed come a time when there would be "none to sit upon the throne of David" (Jer. 22:30; 36:30). Yet *if* the Jews had done righteousness in Zedekiah's time, then instead of the Babylonians entering the gates of Jerusalem there would have been "kings sitting for David upon his throne" (Jer. 22:4 RVmg.). But this condition is not mentioned in the promises to David in 2 Sam. 7 nor in the apparent blanket statement of Jer. 33:17. Jehoiakim was not to be buried but his body thrown out to the elements, like an ass (Jer. 22:18,19; 36:29-31); but the idiom of "he slept with his fathers" (2 Kings 24:6) may imply that he had a more normal burial. This was a conditional prophecy, and perhaps even this blasphemous man repented to some degree.

*Jeremiah 36:31 I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them, because they didn't listen-* "His servants" were those who watched the burning of the scroll and didn't tear their clothes. This sin of silence would lead to their judgment. And the ordinary people were likewise to be condemned, because there ought to have been mass popular revolt against Jehoiakim for what he did. Again, the lesson is all about "the sin of silence", especially when that silence is a suppression of conscience in order to merely continue a status quo which the conservative streak in every human nature tends to prefer.

*Jeremiah 36:32 Then took Jeremiah another scroll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides to them many like words-* The judgments for sin were increased because of the refusal to accept the first judgments. We imagine the scroll being produced whilst in hiding (:26) and then being released so that Jehoiakim heard the contents. Baruch's faithful part in the publication of the word is again emphasized; for he was risking his life to do this. Again we wonder if Jeremiah was unable to write, seeing that again there is the same process of Jeremiah uttering words and Baruch transcribing them.

## Jeremiah Chapter 37

*Jeremiah 37:1 Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king, instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah-* Jeconiah is now called Coniah; the "Yah" prefix is dropped from his name.

*Jeremiah 37:2 But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, listened to the words of Yahweh, which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah-* Zedekiah certainly listened to them and was apparently eager to do so; but we see here the crucial difference between listening, and really listening. This remains a challenge to us, and the more familiar we become with the text of Scripture, the more intense is the challenge. It can help to read the same text from different versions or even in different languages if we can; to by all means try to let God's word hit us afresh as if for the first time. Again we note the parallel between the leadership and the "people of the land"; they got the leadership they subconsciously wanted.

*Jeremiah 37:3 Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah saying, Pray now to Yahweh our God for us-* God had three times told Jeremiah not to pray further for the people (Jer. 7:16; 11:14; 14:11). But Jeremiah knew God well enough to still pray, and God was open enough to dialogue to still answer (:7). Zedekiah was no atheist- he wanted others to pray for him, although he personally would not hear God's word (:1). And he was earnestly interested in knowing whether there was any word from God for him (:17). We note Zedekiah's diffidence to approach Jeremiah directly; perhaps "the priest" was a relative of Jeremiah.

The prayers were asked for at the very time when Judah's hopes were upon Egypt defeating the Babylonians (see on :6). Although Judah were often condemned for trusting the Egyptians rather than Yahweh, they still wanted Jeremiah to pray for Yahweh's help to be with the Egyptians. This is typical of how they committed spiritual adultery with multiple partners, mixing faith in Yahweh with faith in Egypt. See on :8.

*Jeremiah 37:4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people; for they had not put him into prison-* To 'go in and out amongst' can be used as a metaphor for leadership or position of influence. But the term may simply mean he had free movement, and moved amongst the people with his message.

*Jeremiah 37:5 Pharaoh's army had come forth out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they broke up from Jerusalem-* It seems in essence that this situation will be repeated when the latter day Babylon as "king of the north" invades Israel (Dan. 11:44). Those who learnt anything from Bible history will see the similarity and put their faith in God rather than the hope of human deliverance. For Judah's faith was in Egypt rather than in their God.

*Jeremiah 37:6 Then came the word of Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah saying-* This prophecy was to address the way in which Judah were eagerly watching to see whether Egypt would defeat the Babylonians, and thereby lift the threat to them. As the prophets often lament, their faith was in Egypt and not in Yahweh. It might have seemed absolutely the wrong time to make this challenge to them; but it had to be said, in hope they would repent. See on :3.

*Jeremiah 37:7 Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, You shall tell the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me-* This desire to get someone else to pray for you is often mentioned in the Bible. Israel could have had a direct relationship with God as they stood before Him at Sinai, but instead wanted Moses to mediate His word to them; Elymas wanted Peter to pray for him likewise. The unique feature of the one true God is that He invites personal relationship with Him; spirituality rather than mere mass religion.

*Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come forth to help you shall return to Egypt into their own land-* The Egyptians had their own agenda for wanting to fight the Babylonians; they didn't come solely to save Judah. And yet that was how Judah liked to imagine it, and God here goes along with their reasoning.

*Jeremiah 37:8 The Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city; and they shall take it-* As ever, reading all of

Scripture enables us to see the wider picture. We know from Jer. 34:16 that the Jewish leadership 'returned' from their covenant to liberate the poorer brethren whom they had previously abused; and so the Chaldeans would 'return' and destroy them because of this. But in this prophecy, the overall summary is presented. But the return of the Chaldeans was in fact a conditional prophecy; it need not have happened if the Jews had repented meaningfully of their attitude to their poorer brethren.

*And burn it with fire-* The punishment for a whore, which is how Jerusalem had been to God through trusting in Egypt and other nations against Babylon. See on :3.

*Jeremiah 37:9 Thus says Yahweh, Don't deceive yourselves by saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us; for they shall not depart-* I noted on Jer. 4:10 that Jeremiah had falsely accused God of deceiving the people. This corrects him on this point; the people were self deceived, through listening to the deceit of their false prophets (Jer. 29:8). As explained on :8, the Chaldeans could have 'departed' from them if they had let depart their brethren whom they were abusing as servants and slaves (Jer. 34:16). But instead of doing this, they chose to deceive themselves that the Babylonians would in any case depart from them. We see here how people believe what is subconsciously convenient to them. And indeed the unregenerate human heart is the great deceiver, and not some cosmic being called Satan.

*Jeremiah 37:10 For though you had struck the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet would they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire-* The idea is that whatever temporary reverses the Babylonians might appear to suffer, the purpose of God was that they should be used to destroy Judah- unless the Jews repented. All human victories are but short term compared to the final judgment of God. And we need to get that right in our minds for all time. "Wounded" translates the word usually used for "thrust through", referring to the final death wound of a foe. The idea is therefore that even if they were struck down dead, they would be resurrected in order to do God's work against Judah. And this likewise was what could spiritually happen to Judah; they could be revived as the dry bones prophecy of Ez. 36 demonstrates.

*Jeremiah 37:11 It happened that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army-* "Was broken up" suggests someone broke them up. And that was God, in response to the Jews' apparent repentance of enslaving their brethren. Earlier they had asked Jeremiah to pray that the Chaldeans would be broken up from them (s.w. Jer. 21:2). God was not open to that request from Jeremiah- because the condition for the Chaldeans leaving was the peoples' repentance for abusing their brethren. Only they could do that, and no intercession from a third party could change that condition.

*Jeremiah 37:12 then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to receive his portion there, in the midst of the people-* Jeremiah had been told to purchase a field, which he would receive at the restoration (Jer. 32:7-9). It seems this was a momentary lack of judgment on his part- he wanted his inheritance right away, rather than waiting for God's time. However, the Hebrew is difficult here. The AV has "to separate himself thence in the midst of the people". It could equally mean that he had had enough of his ministry in Jerusalem and wanted to separate himself from being in the midst of an apostate people. He learnt his lesson- for at the end of his life, when given the choice of the easy life as guest of honour in Babylon or remaining in the ruined land of Judah, he chose to remain with God's people. And finally, when they disobeyed God and chose to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah went with them, to continue appealing to them. The Hebrew could also mean that he slipped through the gates hiding himself in the midst of the people. Whatever, these three translation options all suggest a not very good decision by Jeremiah. However, it could also be that he was being obedient to God's word- to go out to the Babylonians (Jer. 21:9; 38:2,18) in recognition of the fact that Judah had sinned and deserved to be dominated by their enemies in accordance with the covenant of Dt. 28. The fact the Chaldeans were in retreat at the time, apparently scared by the Egyptian army (:11), showed all the more faith on Jeremiah's part. But he was not allowed to do this act of faith and obedience by others- and so it can be with us. And yet when arrested, Jeremiah denies he is going to the Chaldeans (:14)- even though he had preached that this is what the Jews should do. So it does seem, however we look at this incident, that Jeremiah acted in momentary weakness.

*Jeremiah 37:13 When he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he laid hold on Jeremiah the prophet saying, You are falling away to*

*the Chaldeans-* The details are given as if the cameraman is close up, to enable us to imagine the scene; and the full details of Irijah's family background are given because of the significance of his false accusation. There were Jews who had fallen away to the Chaldeans (s.w. Jer. 38:19), but the implication is that Jeremiah felt his motives to be totally different.

*Jeremiah 37:14 Then Jeremiah said, It is false; I am not falling away to the Chaldeans. But he didn't listen to him; so Irijah laid hold on Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes-* Jeremiah himself taught that Israel should surrender to the Babylonians, in accordance with God's word. He himself tried to do this, in obedience; but he was caught by the Jews. He promptly denied that he was doing this, overcome by the patriotism of the moment, in a desire to save his skin (Jer. 37:14; 38:2).

*Jeremiah 37:15 The princes were angry with Jeremiah and struck him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made that the prison-* In this Jeremiah was a type of the Lord Jesus, indeed more than this- Jeremiah might have been a potential Messiah figure of some sort, but Judah rejected him. The way the servant is beaten, imprisoned and has his hair pulled out (Is. 50:4-11) reminds us of how the prophet Jeremiah was treated the same way by the Jews when his message was rejected (Jer. 20:2; Jer. 37:15). "Jonathan the scribe" may have been a secretary; or a religious scribe. His complicity is therefore the worse.

A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

*Jeremiah 37:16 When Jeremiah had come into the dungeon house and into the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days-* These "cells" were cabins excavated out of the sides of the shaft of the dungeon. "Many days" there would have left people with post traumatic stress if nothing else.

*Jeremiah 37:17 then Zedekiah the king sent and fetched him: and the king asked him secretly in his house saying, Is there any word from Yahweh? Jeremiah said, There is. He said also, You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon-* The 'word' that Zedekiah would be delivered into the hand of the Chaldeans had already been given several times by Jeremiah (Jer. 21:7; 22:25; 32:4; 34:3,21). Perhaps this was no new revelation, but rather Jeremiah reminding Zedekiah of God's word. We can seek some new insight, some new 'word from the Lord'- when actually the answer is staring us in the face in His word which we already know. We perceive that Zedekiah was desperate to hear God's word; despite being characterized as not listening to it (:2). The religious conscience within all men is strong; and those who have been exposed to the one true God will always be unable to totally forget Him. Zedekiah was asking for this revelation from God at the very time when all his hopes were pinned upon salvation from Egypt (:5); and yet even then, he had this uncanny sense that he needed revelation from Yahweh. We recall Saul's desperate seeking for God's word the night before he was killed.

*Jeremiah 37:18 Moreover Jeremiah said to king Zedekiah, Wherein have I sinned against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison?-* Jeremiah's questions were perhaps simply to plead for deliverance from what appeared certain death in the dungeon (:20). But perhaps he also was seeking for Zedekiah's repentance for having treated him like this. Jeremiah hoped this would be elicited by presenting Zedekiah with the question as to what, exactly, had Jeremiah done wrong? And what had provoked his imprisonment was his touching of the king's conscience by challenging him to repent. And Jeremiah was asking the king to recognize that, and live according to his conscience before Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 37:19 Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, The king of Babylon shall not come*

*against you, nor against this land?*- "Your prophets" sounds as if Zedekiah had surrounded himself with those who spoke what he wanted to hear; it's as if he had appointed his personal prophets. We can effectively do the same, by listening only to those teachers whom we know are going to say that which we wish to hear.

*Jeremiah 37:20 Now please hear, my lord the king: please let my supplication be presented before you, that you not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, unless I die there-* We sense the awful desperation of Jeremiah, facing a slow and miserable death. When Zedekiah called Jeremiah out of the prison house to meet him and show him the word of God, he ought to have perceived that he was going through the very experience of Pharaoh with Joseph (Jer. 37:17,20). Jeremiah's desperate plea not to be sent back to prison to die there surely echoes that of Joseph to his brethren; for Jeremiah was let down like Joseph had been into a pit with no water in, so reminiscent of Joseph (Gen. 37:24). But Zedekiah didn't want to see all this; he should've listened to Jeremiah, as Pharaoh had listened to Joseph and saved himself. It was all potentially set up for him; but he refused to take note.

*Jeremiah 37:21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded and they committed Jeremiah into the court of the guard; and they gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers' street-* The events of chapter 38 show how this assurance was not kept by Zedekiah- a reflection of his powerlessness, as well as the weakness of his character. We sense Zedekiah wanting to do the right thing, to save God's prophet from death, even bringing him to live in the court of the guard within his own palace; and yet being so consumed by issues of image; and fears about irrelevancies that arise from assuming we are not going to die, nor face Divine judgment for our sins.

*Until all the bread in the city was spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard-* This could have been the words of Zedekiah, as if he recognized there would come about a point when all the bread was finished, and Jeremiah was to be fed until the very end. But the idea may be that it was when this point was reached that the walls were breached and the city fell (Jer. 52:6); as if to say that Jeremiah had bread right up to the end.

## Jeremiah Chapter 38

*Jeremiah 38:1 Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah and Pashhur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah spoke to all the people saying-* Gedaliah was the son of the Pashhur of Jer. 20:1 who had put Jeremiah in the stocks. Jucal is that of Jer. 37:3. The other Pashhur is that of Jer. 21:1.

*Jeremiah 38:2 Thus says Yahweh, He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; but he who goes forth to the Chaldeans shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey, and he shall live-* Jeremiah himself taught that Israel should surrender to the Babylonians, in accordance with God's word. He himself tried to do this, in obedience; but he was caught by the Jews. He promptly denied that he was doing this, overcome by the patriotism of the moment, in a desire to save his skin (Jer. 37:14; 38:2). Jeremiah wanted to flee the city so as not to die; he very nearly did die of famine (:9), in order to achieve his total identification with his sinful people. This identification was why the Lord died the death of a criminal on the cross.

The prediction of death by plague in Jer. 21:6 was therefore conditional. Those prophetic words need not have come true if Israel had been obedient to this call to surrender. "Passes over" is literally "to fall down". They were to accept their condemnation, and thereby save their lives. Their lives would be to them "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. In the future, at the Lord's return, we will be saved from wrath (i.e. condemnation) through Christ (Rom. 5:9). Whilst this has already been achieved in a sense, it will be materially articulated in that day- in that we will feel and know ourselves to be worthy of God's wrath, but then be saved from it. We are all to some extent in the position of Zedekiah and the men of Judah, who was told that if they accepted God's condemnation of them as just, and served the King of Babylon, then they would ultimately be saved; but if they refused to accept that condemnation, then they would be eternally destroyed (Jer. 21:9; 27:12). And the Babylonian invasion was a type of the final judgment.

*Jeremiah 38:3 Thus says Yahweh, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it-* It was on one hand "sure" and certain, but right up to the very end, it was possible for Judah to repent and the siege to be lifted. 'Given... and taken' is the term used for how Yahweh gave the cities of Canaan to Israel and they took them (Josh. 10:32). He had given Jerusalem into the hand of their enemies- exactly the opposite of how people then understood a tribal god to act. He was supposed to always protect his city from the hand of their enemies, regardless of their morality. Yahweh was showing Himself to be so much more than mere religion, a simple tribal god. Denominationalism can be little more than believing in tribal deities.

*Jeremiah 38:4 Then the princes said to the king, Please let this man be put to death; because he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words to them: for this man doesn't seek the welfare of this people, but their hurt-* The hands of the Jews are contrasted with the hands of Babylon (:3). They were as it were arm wrestling against God's intentions. The Jews were to be repentant and "seek the welfare" or "peace" of *Babylon*, to the end Babylon might repent and become part of God's restored kingdom (Jer. 29:7). This was such a radically different agenda to that of the flesh. By their impenitence, the Jews were seeking hurt and not peace / welfare to themselves (Am. 5:14 s.w.).

*Jeremiah 38:5 Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he who can do anything against you-* The LXX makes this clause a comment of the narrator ("For the king was not able..."). Jeremiah in :15 didn't consider this to be the case, understanding it rather as an excuse. Zedekiah ought to have reflected that his lack of hand / power in this matter was true on a larger scale too; for he had been given into the hand of the Babylonians (:3). God may bring a smaller scale situation into our lives to teach us of our powerlessness on a larger scale.

*Jeremiah 38:6 Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son, that was in the court of the guard-* AVmg. "the son of Hammelech" (Jer. 36:26). This was as it were the punishment cell within the prison.

*And they let down Jeremiah with cords. In the dungeon there was no water, but mud; and Jeremiah sank in the mud-*

See on :22. The only way to eat would have been to have food lowered down, and seeing the city was suffering famine, chances of survival were slim. The pit in which there was no water would have reminded him of Joseph's experience (Gen. 37:24), and he may well have looked therefore towards some miraculous deliverance. His thoughts at this time are in Lam. 3, where he wrote in his mind a prayer or psalm about it. But he felt his prayers were shut out by the covering placed upon the dungeon (Lam. 3:8,53), and he was enclosed within hewn stone (Lam. 3:9)- what the dungeon walls were made of. It was presumably a sewer, with excrement falling before his face. He therefore felt he was in a living death and burial, surrounded by gravel stones as if in a grave (Lam. 3:16). His enemies mocked him from above (Lam. 3:14), pouring water that was probably excrement upon him (Lam. 3:54; as the dungeon was a sewer), his teeth were broken from the beating and perhaps from the descent into the dungeon (Lam. 3:16), and he felt bitter with God rather than full of faith and hope in deliverance (Lam. 3:15). But then his faith revived, reflecting how God had still not destroyed Judah by His great grace (Lam. 3:22), and therefore every day he survived until morning he saw as God's grace to him, in which he could hope (Lam. 3:23). He realized he was Judah's representative; for they too were to be sent forth from Babylon, the pit in which there was no water (Zech. 9:11). And this gave him hope; just as God's great grace to Israel historically should be basis for our hope. See on :13.

*Jeremiah 38:7 Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon (the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin)-* This was the spot where Jeremiah had been arrested (Jer. 37:13) and earlier had been put in the stocks there (Jer. 20:2). Perhaps therefore the king's inner thoughts were upon Jeremiah, and Ebedmelech was guided therefore to approach the king at just the right time.

*Jeremiah 38:8 Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house and spoke to the king saying-* He approached the king outside of the king's house, privately. Always we sense Zedekiah's concern about image and what others would think of him.

*Jeremiah 38:9 My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die in the place where he is-* Heb. "is dead of hunger on the spot". This kind of apparent exaggeration is common in Semitic languages.

*Because of the famine-* Jeremiah had frequently prophesied that the impenitent Jews were to die of the famine. Now, Jeremiah is on the brink of death because of famine. He was led by these experiences to absolutely identify with the condemned. Just as the Lord Jesus died the death of sinners, of a criminal, and thereby tasted death for every man. Being a captive in the dungeon who is released is exactly the language of Isaiah about the release of the exiles from captivity. Jeremiah was their example and personification. They could have followed his path, but chose to remain in that dark dungeon of Babylon.

*For there is no more bread in the city-* This was only true at the end (Jer. 52:6); if it were literally true, there would have been no point in releasing Jeremiah. This exaggerated language is not corrected, as often in the Biblical record.

*Jeremiah 38:10 Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Take from here thirty men with you, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies-* That it would take thirty men to get Jeremiah out of the dungeon indicates the serious depth to which Jeremiah had sunk. And there was the possibility of opposition to Ebedmelech if he attempted to do this alone. We can imagine the racism against an Ethiopian, especially as Egypt / Ethiopia had now been shown to be false friends of Judah and powerless to help Judah. Yet God so loves to work through the despised and marginal.

*Jeremiah 38:11 So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there rags and worn-out clothes and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah-* It was common in those days to symbolically tear clothes in grief. And what then happened to the clothes? They were kept in the treasury, as the material itself was valuable. These symbols of past repentance were used to save Jeremiah's life.

*Jeremiah 38:12 Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, Put now these rags and worn-out clothes under your*

*armpits under the cords. Jeremiah did so-* We note Ebedmelech's sensitivity, imagining how the cords would bite into Jeremiah's armpits unless there was some material to cushion them. His voice echoing down the sewer would have seemed as the voice of God responding to Jeremiah's feeble prayers as recorded in Lam. 3.

*Jeremiah 38:13 So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard-* Perhaps Jeremiah as Judah's representative experienced the 'drawing up' unto salvation offered to Judah in the new covenant, when he was "drawn up" out of certain death in the dungeon (Jer. 38:13, s.w. "with loving kindness have I drawn you [up]", Jer. 31:3). His hope in salvation from the pit was because he perceived he was Israel's representative; see on :6. The dungeon "was in the court of the guard" so Jeremiah would have lived continuously within sight of the dungeon of death, the ultimate punishment cell in the makeshift prison.

*Jeremiah 38:14 Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet to him into the third entry that is in the house of Yahweh-* Or, "the entry of the body-guard". Perhaps this was the king's special entry to the temple (2 Kings 16:18).

*And the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me-* Zedekiah was aware that Jeremiah would be tempted to give him only some of God's word, hiding from him the harder parts. Zedekiah wanted God's truth, and yet was unprepared to act upon it. That is so true of so many people, and probably of all of us at some times and in some ways. To 'want to find the truth' can be trendy and attractive; but the question is not so much as to whether we have an interest in finding it, but will we do with it once confronted with it. See on :26.

*Jeremiah 38:15 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me-* Jeremiah clearly didn't accept Zedekiah's plea of impotence in :5. Instead of simply begging Zedekiah for deliverance and saying what Zedekiah wanted to hear, Jeremiah comes over as absolutely committed to the truth of God's words about the situation.

*Jeremiah 38:16 So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah saying, As Yahweh lives, who made us this soul, I will not put you to death-* The fact God has given us life ought to mean that we are truthful and honest in our words; and that we will seek to preserve the life of others rather than take it from them. This is all the implication of the most basic truth of the Genesis record- that God created man and made him a living soul / creature.

*Neither will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life-* This may have been said with a nod towards "these men" nearby. It contradicts Zedekiah's excuse that he could do nothing against the will of his courtiers in :5. We too can plead weakness, railroading and impotence to justify our lack of purpose and commitment to principle.

*Jeremiah 38:17 Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: If you will go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your family-* Jeremiah picks up on Zedekiah's comment that God made us this soul (:16). This is the way towards dialogue; using the words and phrases of others and reframing them in a way which will therefore be the more persuasive to them. God here offers salvation from the whole judgment scenario for the sake of just one thing- if Zedekiah had surrendered to Babylon. Likewise if the Jews had properly released their bondservants, then the Babylonians would have departed. All the idolatry, murder and spiritual prostitution would have been overlooked just for the sake of one act of obedience. These offers were made in order to highlight the importance of the request being made- in this case, to accept the rightness of the Divine judgment for sin. Just one man's humility could have averted so much suffering. But human fear and pride was too great to allow it.

Jer. 34:5 says that "You shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord!". It surely has to be recognized that the 'prophecy' that Zedekiah would die in peace was conditional upon his obedience to the word of Jeremiah- even though those conditions aren't recorded (although they are implicit surely).

*Jeremiah 38:18 But if you will not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire-* God somehow arranged things within His purpose so that Zedekiah's repentance would have enabled the salvation of all Israel. But his failure to repent meant that judgment came on His people. What this shows is that there are times and places where God is willing to save people for the

sake of the spirituality of a third party, but if he or she fails in this, deliverance doesn't *necessarily* arise from another place, as it would have done in Esther's time.

*And you shall not escape out of their hand-* Zedekiah's attempt to escape the city was therefore made in conscious disobedience to these words.

*Jeremiah 38:19 Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews who are fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand and they mock me-* These were the Jews who had accepted their judgment was just and had surrendered. They had likely been abused by Zedekiah and the Jewish leadership beforehand. And so he feared they would mock him. Jeremiah had used just this word about what would be done to Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jer. 6:9), but Zedekiah's pride was such that he feared the mocking of his fellow Jews more than he did that of the Babylonians. We have a window here into the extent of his pride, and the fears which arise from pride.

*Jeremiah 38:20 But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver you. Obey, I beg you, the voice of Yahweh, in that which I speak to you: so it shall be well with you, and your soul shall live-* These Jews were those who had heeded Jeremiah's warnings and surrendered to the Chaldeans in recognition of their sins. They were therefore probably known to Jeremiah, and would therefore welcome Zedekiah's surrender. The implication is that Zedekiah's soul would not live unless he surrendered. But he didn't surrender. Yet by grace he was not killed, but actually died in peace in Babylon. Presumably he did therefore repent, and God by utter grace changed his deserved punishment.

*Jeremiah 38:21 But if you refuse to go forth, this is the word that Yahweh has shown me-* The Hebrew for "refuse" is only elsewhere used of Pharaoh refusing to let Israel go (Ex. 8:2; 9:2; 10:4). The deliverance of Israel was likewise being allowed to hinge upon the humility or pride of one man. Zedekiah was surely intended to see the appeal to precedent in Biblical history, just as we often are. This is one advantage of being familiar with the text and basic narrative of the Bible through daily Bible reading.

*Jeremiah 38:22 behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Your familiar friends have deceived you and have prevailed over you. Your feet are now sunk in the mud, and they now turn away from you-* Preaching has to be personal. For God is all about the salvation of persons; and He hungers for intimacy with her persons whom He has created. We each make an individual witness, and that witness is intended by God to be uniquely suitable for certain people within our sphere of contact. Jeremiah is an example of how our witness to others should be framed in the language of our own experiences, thus giving it credibility. He had just been in the dungeon, where he had sunk down in the mud (Jer. 38:6). But he soon afterwards appeals to Zedekiah to have the courage to do what God wants and not what his princes think is humanly smarter. Metaphorically, Jeremiah says, it was Zedekiah whose "feet are sunk in the mire" (Jer. 38:22). 'Spiritually, you're like I was physically', was what Jeremiah was saying. And because he personalized his message in this way, it became all the more credible. Thus a blind brother can speak about our spiritual blindness with an obvious appropriacy and credibility which the sighted lack. This is why all witness simply has to be personal- impersonal handing out of tracts or hiding behind web sites on the internet isn't the essentially personal witness which God intended.

*Jeremiah 38:23 They shall bring out all your wives and your children to the Chaldeans; and you shall not escape out of their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and you shall cause this city to be burned with fire-* Zedekiah's attempt to escape the city was therefore made in conscious disobedience to these words. We note the emphasis upon the suffering of women and children (:22,23). It is simply so that there are consequences of human sin which mean that others are affected far beyond the sinner. The innocent suffer because of the sins of others. That is why sin is so multi dimensional; although in this case it would be true to say that the women themselves were also guilty of idolatry (Jer. 7:18; 44:17). But this could have been overlooked for the sake of one man's humble repentance.

*Jeremiah 38:24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and you shall not die-* Again, his claim of being impotent to save Jeremiah in :5 is shown to be false. He was worried lest it become known that God had made this deal with him, whereby his repentance alone could radically affect the outcome for Jerusalem. Again, his pride and concern about image is so pathetically apparent. His offer of not killing Jeremiah if he didn't publish

this latest word from the Lord is in fact similar to what he imagined the princes' position would be (:25). So this was but a carefully calculated offer.

*Jeremiah 38:25 But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and tell you, Declare to us now what you have said to the king; don't hide it from us, and we will not put you to death; also what the king said to you-* This connects with how Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah not to "hide" God's word from him; see on :26.

A study of "the princes" of Judah at the time of the final Babylonian invasion shows that they were not against Jeremiah nor responding to God's word (Jer. 26:16; 36:14,19); indeed at one stage they pulled back from their path of refusing to respond (Jer. 34:10). But "the princes" were the ones whom Zedekiah feared (Jer. 38:25), and that fear led him to reject God's word. And "the princes" were finally condemned for their weakness (Jer. 32:32); it was they who imprisoned and sought to kill Jeremiah because ultimately they could not abide his word (Jer. 37:15; 38:14). One person or a very small group can easily lead a whole group, even of believers, into sin. And so it is that whole groups of people- even God's people- can be very fickle.

*Jeremiah 38:26 then you shall tell them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there-* The dungeon of death was in the court of the guard, where Jeremiah was now located. He likely was quartered just meters away from it. "Jonathan's house" was perhaps a name for that dungeon of death. And Jeremiah surely had requested this, and so this was not untrue; but it was a hiding from the princes of what had really transpired. Zedekiah had asked Jeremiah not to do this to him, but to give full disclosure of God's word (:14). He ought to have reflected upon this inconsistency, and instead have openly told the princes of the situation and his obedience to God's word.

*Jeremiah 38:27 Then came all the princes to Jeremiah, and asked him; and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived-* The fact we are now reading of it shows that it was of course finally perceived. LXX "And they were silent, because the word of the Lord was not heard". Zedekiah heard the word, but didn't really hear it; just as we can hear and read the word of God but not really hear it. This surface level hearing of God's word becomes a more acute temptation as we become the more familiar with the Bible text.

*Jeremiah 38:28 So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken-* We imagine the Babylonian soldiers closing in on the court, the guards fleeing, and the soldiers encountering the grateful but confused prisoners.

## Jeremiah Chapter 39

*Jeremiah 39:1 It happened when Jerusalem was taken, (in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and besieged it-* The exacter date is given in Jer. 52:4-7, meaning that the siege lasted exactly 18 months.

*Jeremiah 39:2 in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city)-* The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did, living out his own condemnation; see on :7. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

*Jeremiah 39:3 that all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate-* The gate separating the citadel of Zion where the temple was, from the rest of Jerusalem. In other words, the temple was about to be taken.

*Nergal Sharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarsechim, Rabsaris, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, with all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon-* These are titles rather than personal names. Many of them are plays on the names of their gods, such as Nebo. Rabmag was the master of the magi, and the idea was that the gods of Babylon had triumphed over Jerusalem.

*Jeremiah 39:4 It happened that when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, then they fled and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls-* It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

*And he went out towards the Arabah-* "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13).

*Jeremiah 39:5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath-* The main lying helpless on the Jerusalem - Jericho road was surely modeled on Zedekiah being overtaken there by his enemies. That weak, vacillating man basically loved God's word, he wanted to be obedient, but just couldn't bring himself to do it. And so he was, quite justly, condemned. It's as if the Lord saw in that wretched, pathetic man a type of all those He came to save. And even in this wretched position, the Lord will pick us up and carry us home. Pursuing and overtaking are the words used of the punishment to come upon those who broke the covenant (Dt. 28:45).

*And he gave judgment on him-* He 'spoke judgments', as if Zedekiah were a common criminal no longer protected by his royal status. 2 Kings 25:5 adds the detail that his army was scattered from him; he was left alone to face judgment. This was God's intention; to make Zedekiah face judgment alone, so that he might be the more in touch with his God and repent. For this is one function of the loneliness which God brings.

*Jeremiah 39:6 Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon killed all the nobles of Judah-* The princes were killed, but Zedekiah was spared. He had been given a wonderful opportunity to repent in Jer. 38, but had spurned it. And yet he was still spared the loss of his life, although he had been told he would lose his life (Jer. 38:17). Presumably his deep repentance as he faced his condemnation was so impressive that God spared his life; whereas the princes didn't repent.

*Jeremiah 39:7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon-* This is how Jeremiah saw Nebuchadnezzar's eyes (Jer. 34:3) and yet came to Babylon without seeing it (Ez. 12:13). Zedekiah fled Jerusalem disguised as a woman with his face so bound around with some disguise that he couldn't see (Ez. 12:12). He was living out his own condemnation, which was to be blinded. See on :2.

*Jeremiah 39:8 The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem-* Israel were told to "throw down", "break in pieces" and "utterly destroy" the idols and altars of Canaan. There were times during their history when they obeyed this command by purging themselves from their apostasy in this. The Hebrew words used scarcely occur elsewhere, except very frequently in the context of how God "broke down", "threw down" and "destroyed" Israel at the hands of their Babylonian and Assyrian invaders as a result of their not 'breaking down' (etc.) the idols. "Throw down" in Ex. 34:13; Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 is the same word in 2 Chron. 36:19; Jer. 4:26; 31:28; 33:4; 39:8; 52:14; Ez. 16:39; Nah. 1:6. "Cut down" in Dt. 7:5; 12:3; 2 Chron. 31:1 later occurs in Is. 10:33; Jer. 48:25; Lam. 2:3. So Israel faced the choice: either cut down your idols, or you will be cut down in the day of God's judgment. Those who worshipped idols were like unto them. The stone will either fall on us and destroy us, or we must fall on it and become broken men and women (Mt. 21:44). For the man untouched by the concept of living for God's glory, it's a hard choice.

*Jeremiah 39:9 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city, the deserters also who fell away to him, and the residue of the people who remained-* The "remnant" is the remainder of those who had not died from the sword, famine or plague. But there was a large element of "the poor of the people" (:10) who remained.

*Jeremiah 39:10 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, who had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time-* The majority of the population remained, because they were those who had nothing and were abused by the wealthy minority; and they received their vineyards and fields. They did well out of the Babylonian invasion; and that was Babylonian policy, to deport only the leadership and ingratiate themselves to the poor masses, in the hope they would thereby have their loyalty.

It needs to be noted that poverty has a way of distracting, terribly so. Merely giving aid to the poor won't automatically make converts- true converts. It's simply not true that desperately poor people will somehow respond better than others to the Gospel. The Jews left in the land at the time of the exile were the very poorest. But actually these were the spiritually weaker in the long run, and it was the more wealthy who went to Babylon who were the "good figs" of Jer. 24:3-8.

*Jeremiah 39:11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon commanded Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard concerning Jeremiah saying-* Nebuchadnezzar was then at Hamath, Antioch on the Orontes. He would have heard about Jeremiah from the Jews who had already defected in response to Jeremiah's prophecies, and they would have told him of Jeremiah's prophecies; which was why he was well disposed toward Jeremiah, perhaps ignorant of or choosing to ignore the other prophecies about Babylon's destruction.

*Jeremiah 39:12 Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him even as he shall tell you-* 'To set the eyes upon for good' (Heb.), "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

*Jeremiah 39:13 So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushazban, Rabsharis, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon-* The top brass of Babylon were all involved in this singular mission- to locate and do well to this individual called Jeremiah. Such was God's deep desire to reward and care for

Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 39:14 they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guard, and committed him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he lived among the people-* But initially Jeremiah was taken captive in chains (Jer. 40:1), perhaps in the confusion which arose after the sacking of Jerusalem. He was released from those chains and given the best treatment, given a place in the house of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed governor. But Jeremiah had a heart for people, wanting only to minister God's word to them. Even that relatively luxurious position is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people". And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast.

*Jeremiah 39:15 Now the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the guard, saying-* This is the word that had come to Jeremiah previously. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological, but arranged by theme. Here the theme is that God wonderfully preserved Jeremiah because of his faithfulness; and He did the same for Ebedmelech.

*Jeremiah 39:16 Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring My words on this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished before you in that day-* Jeremiah was "shut up" in prison (:15); so 'going' is used in the figurative sense, as a metaphor to describe taking the Gospel to someone, even if we are confined to our bed. See more examples of this noted on 1 Pet. 3:19.

*Jeremiah 39:17 But I will deliver you in that day, says Yahweh; and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid-* To march into the prison with 30 men and rescue Jeremiah from the dungeon of death was nothing less than staging a jail break. Ebedmelech showed huge faith and devotion in doing this, and naturally feared for his life afterwards. His deliverance from the Jews was to encourage him that like Jeremiah, his life would be saved from the Babylonians too. "You shall not be given..." is just what Zedekiah had been encouraged- if he had repented (Jer. 38:20). He likewise was "afraid of... men", the same Jewish princes who were out to kill Ebedmelech. We see here the thematic nature of the book of Jeremiah. God worked in the same way in parallel lives, and some accepted His promises and others didn't.

*Jeremiah 39:18 For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but your life shall be for a prey to you; because you have put your trust in me, says Yahweh-* His life would be to him "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. LXX "and you shall find your life" is alluded to in the Lord's promise that he who loses his life [or risks losing it] for the Lord's sake shall find it (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). The reward for Ebedmelech was not just that he would save his physical life, but that he would find his true life. He thereby stands representative of us all.

## Jeremiah Chapter 40

*Jeremiah 40:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh-* There is no prophetic revelation for some time in the passage, as the following historical summary was required to give context to it.

*After Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon-* As explained on Jer. 39:14, initially Jeremiah was taken captive in chains, perhaps in the confusion which arose after the sacking of Jerusalem; despite the specific command of none less than Nebuchadnezzar to give him special care and honour. He was released from those chains and given the best treatment, given a place in the house of Gedaliah whom the Babylonians had appointed governor. But Jeremiah had a heart for people, wanting only to minister God's word to them. Even that relatively luxurious position is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people" (Jer. 39:14). And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast. Perhaps Jeremiah went through this brief experience of being bound in chains so that he, like the Lord Jesus, could experience the condemnation of his people despite being personally innocent.

*Jeremiah 40:2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, Yahweh your God pronounced this evil on this place-* The captain knew this because Jeremiah's prophetic words had been published and were well known. This is to Jeremiah's credit; that he didn't just keep his unpopular message to himself.

*Jeremiah 40:3 and Yahweh has brought it, and done according as He spoke: because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come on you-* As noted on :2, Jeremiah's earlier words had been well distributed. We note that Nebuzaradan uses the covenant Name of Yahweh. As intended, the whole tragedy was used to magnify God's Name and word amongst the Gentiles. People at that time understood a tribal god as always defending his own city. But this man understood that Yahweh was not such a tribal god; He brought judgment against His own people because He had a moral agenda, and was deeply sensitive to sin against Him. At that time, the whole concept of sin as a felt offence against a deity was unheard of.

*Jeremiah 40:4 Now, behold, I release you this day from the chains which are on your hand-* Jeremiah was representative of Judah; they too could have been loosed from their chains if they had repented and adopted God's perspective as Jeremiah did. Jeremiah was to be their pattern.

*If it seems good to you to come with me into Babylon, come, and I will take care of you; but if it seems bad to you to come with me into Babylon, don't-* 'To set the eyes upon for good' (Heb.), "take care of" or "look well unto", could mean that God's eyes, the Angels, would bless the "good figs" in captivity and lead them to repentance and salvation. For that is the ultimate "good" which God plans for His people. But twice we read that Jeremiah could have gone into captivity and been looked upon for good (Jer. 39:12; 40:4 s.w. "I will set My eyes on them for good" in Jer. 24:6). Yet Jeremiah declined; he chose to suffer affliction with the condemned, with the bad figs of the Jer. 24 prophecy, so that he might still help them to repentance. This looked forward to the Lord's death as a sinner on the cross. And it is to be our spirit too, ever seeking the repentance of those who otherwise will be condemned rather than enjoying time solely with those who apparently will be saved.

*Behold, all the land is before you; where it seems good and right to you to go, there go-* This is the language of Israel entering the land (Dt. 3:18 etc.). Again, Jeremiah was the representative of Judah and the living example of what could have been, and what could yet be for them.

*Jeremiah 40:5 If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go. So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go-* We are sometimes given such great freedom of choice, in order that we might have a chance to search our motives and do that which we "think right". Jeremiah's response is a stellar example to us. He chose to suffer affliction with God's people rather than seek his own security and prosperity in Babylon. Sometimes there are no morally wrong choices before us; but what is required is the right motivation for the choices we make. To have gone to Babylon and worked on bringing about the fulfillment of the "good figs" prophecy would surely have been legitimate. Instead Jeremiah chose to remain with the condemned, the "evil figs" who would not respond... in the hope they would somehow respond. He

chose to "dwell among the people".

*Jeremiah 40:6 Then went Jeremiah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land-* It is repeatedly emphasized that Jeremiah "lived... among the people". Even though he lived in Gedaliah's house in relatively luxury, his living is described according to how Jeremiah perceived it- he lived "among the people" (also :1; Jer. 39:14). And this of course is an example to us, wherever our lot be cast.

*Jeremiah 40:7 Now when all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him men, and women, and children, and of the poorest of the land, of those who were not carried away captive to Babylon-* The existence of surviving Jewish military units indicates that the total destruction of Judah as intimated in Jeremiah's earlier prophecies didn't totally come about. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps the mediation and repentance of a minority led to Him ameliorating His judgments. That is a theme of all his prophecies.

*Jeremiah 40:8 then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men-* Ishmael was later to murder Gedaliah, considering that he was the rightful king of Judah. It seems he had taken refuge with Baalis king of the Ammonites during the Babylonian invasion (:14).

*Jeremiah 40:9 Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan swore to them and to their men saying, Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon-* Gedaliah was advocating the earlier appeal of Jeremiah; if the people accepted they had sinned and willingly accepted the judgment for it, servitude of their enemies, then all would be well for them. They were not to fear the Babylonians; the LXX and 2 Kings 25:24 say that they were not to fear "because of the servants of the Chaldeans", referring to the various Babylonian garrisons now stationed throughout the land.

*And it shall be well with you-* "Amend" in the earlier appeals for repentance (e.g. Jer. 7:5) is the word here translated 'to do well to'. If they amended their ways, God would amend or change His plans of judgment. Here we behold the openness of God, His deep sensitivity to human repentance and change.

*Jeremiah 40:10 As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand before the Chaldeans who shall come to us-* Gedaliah like any true leader was leading the way by example; living in the land and serving the Chaldeans, as he had advised others to do.

*But you, gather grapes and summer fruits and oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken-* There had been a sudden reversal of everything. The abused majority had now been given the wealth and cities of the wealthy minority who had abused them. Dwelling in the cities taken suggests again the inheritance of the land after the exodus. There was really the possibility of a new start. The harvest had not been harvested by the wealthy, and so the poor took it for themselves.

*Jeremiah 40:11 Likewise when all the Jews who were in Moab, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and who were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan-* This dwelling of Israel's outcasts with Moab, Edom and Ammon was a repeat of what had happened during the previous Assyrian invasion (Is. 16:4). There were the same possibilities- of a miraculous Divine intervention and salvation.

*Jeremiah 40:12 then all the Jews returned out of all places where they were driven, and came to the land of Judah to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, and gathered grapes and summer fruits very much-* As explained on :10, this was the harvest not gathered by the wealthy minority, due to the war. Again we see similarities with the entrance of Israel into the land, where they possessed cities and ate harvest which they had not planted. It seems there was the possibility of some restoration of the Kingdom of God in Israel through these who returned from where they had fled. Jer. 8:20 uses the same term to describe how the summer fruits had ended as a result of Divine judgment; but apparently the summer fruits had returned.

*Jeremiah 40:13 Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah-* Ishmael had presumably tried to get them to join in his plan of killing Gedaliah (:14); but Johanan and the other army commanders had refused to participate in the plot. Presumably they were of a mind to be obedient to Gedaliah's example of submitting to Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant, as a form of submission to Yahweh. This would have been especially difficult for military men who had been resisting the Babylonians. And yet it seems that they were willing to do this; otherwise they would have sided with Ishmael's desperate bid for independence from Babylon.

*Jeremiah 40:14 and said to him, Do you know that Baalis the king of the children of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam didn't believe them-* The king of Ammon may have been personally against Jeremiah after hearing his prophecies about Ammon of Jer. 27:3, and the demand that Ammon submit to Babylon and thence to Yahweh God of Israel. He therefore was against Gedaliah, who clearly was acting in obedience to Jeremiah's prophecies by submitting to Babylon (understanding Nebuchadnezzar as Yahweh's servant) as a form of submission to Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 40:15 Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly saying, Please let me go, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know it: why should he take your life, that all the Jews who are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?-* Johanan thought that Ishmael's plan would lead to Babylonian vengeance to the point of them slaying all who remained in Judah. This is indeed the language of some of Jeremiah's prophecies; and yet this never happened, because in wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps the mediation and repentance of a minority led to Him ameliorating His judgments. Ishmael did kill Gedaliah, and some of the Babylonians with him. And yet this total destruction of all Judah never happened; another testament to God's desperate grace and saving love toward His people.

*Jeremiah 40:16 But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, You shall not do this thing; for you speak falsely of Ishmael-* Ishmael was from the royal family (Jer. 41:1), and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about Ishmael was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

## Jeremiah Chapter 41

*Jeremiah 41:1 Now it happened in the seventh month-* Three months after the capture and two after the burning of the city.

*That Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal and one of the chief officers of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they ate bread together in Mizpah-* Ishmael was from the royal family, and therefore assumed that he ought to be the rightful ruler of Judah rather than Gedaliah, who was but a willing puppet of Babylon. But it was not then the time to restore the Kingdom and throne of David, and certainly not in the form of someone as deceitful as Ishmael. Ishmael clearly disbelieved the prophecies concerning the ending of the royal family. Perhaps Gedaliah's willing naivety about Ishmael in Jer. 40:16 was because he could not entertain any plan to slay a member of the royal family, remembering David's attitude to Saul.

*Jeremiah 41:2 Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land-* They failed to accept that Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, doing His will, and therefore the appointment of Gedaliah was also sanctioned by God. Perhaps their game plan was that Baalis of Ammon would take over Judah, and Ishmael would be made the ruler (Jer. 40:14). People will commit murder and any manner of sin for the sake of dreams of power.

*Jeremiah 41:3 Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war-* If Ishmael truly wished to do the best for Judah by becoming their ruler, he surely would not have killed his fellow Jews. But he did so because he was working for the king of Ammon and was following his agenda, in hope of personal benefit and power thereby; see on :2.

*Jeremiah 41:4 It happened the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, and no man knew it-* This perhaps was why he killed all the Jews and Babylonians present (:3); to delay the spreading of the news, and to enable himself to carry out the plans of the king of Ammon and establish his own power.

*Jeremiah 41:5 That there came men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even eighty men, having their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and having cut themselves, with meal offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh-* This could mean that a shrine had been erected in Mizpah. Or it could refer to 80 people coming to offer offerings and perform some kind of worship at the site of the Jerusalem temple even after the Babylonian destruction. Significantly, they were from the decimated ten tribe kingdom of Israel. Clearly even amongst them, a minority were still relatively faithful; contrasting with Judah's boast that they alone were faithful and God had rejected Israel. There's ample historical reference to the essential ground plan and some structure still standing even after the Babylonians had effectively destroyed it and rendered it useless (See R.S. Foster, *The Restoration Of Israel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970) p. 28; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981) p. 325; Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: SCM, 1983) p. 291). This makes it more appealing to consider Ezekiel's vision as a blueprint for the exiles' reconstructing the existing temple, rather than a totally new structure. We also must compare this fact against the prophecies in Jeremiah and Ezekiel which speak of total destruction of man, beast and everything in the land. That didn't happen to the extent envisaged. Perhaps God in pity simply didn't carry out all His intended wrath. Or maybe there was a modicum of repentance or intercession which ameliorated His plans. Or perhaps He realized that the intended judgments would not in fact bring about the repentance envisaged at the time, and therefore the full extent of those judgments has been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

*Jeremiah 41:6 Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it happened, as he met them, he said to them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam-* This weeping was presumably in pretence grief at the loss of the temple, encouraging them to think that he like they (see on :5) were loyal to Yahweh worship. Perhaps it was their loyalty to Yahweh worship which was his motive for enticing them to come to Mizpah and murdering them; see on :5. We wonder what other motive he may have had.

*Jeremiah 41:7 It was so that when they came into the midst of the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men who were with him-* There is an ongoing theme of pits. Jeremiah was cast into the pit; and yet was miraculously saved. It's as if that experience was to connect him with the experiences of the suffering faithful, making him look forward the more to the Lord Jesus as the representative Saviour.

*Jeremiah 41:8 But ten men were found among those who said to Ishmael, Don't kill us; for we have stores hidden in the field, of wheat, barley, oil and honey. So he stopped, and didn't kill them among their brothers-* These signs of material wealth would have been as the treasure hid in a field. They would have given Ishmael the details of how to find them, or perhaps the keys to the pits. We see here his materialism, crude and plain. There is a strange theme of pits- faithful men were cast into them (see on :7), whilst the unfaithful filled them with their own wealth.

*Jeremiah 41:9 Now the cistern in which Ishmael cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had killed along with Gedaliah was the same which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with those who were killed-* This connection is perhaps because of the continued theme of civil war between God's people. The men killed by the would be leader of Judah were from the ten tribe kingdom (see on :5). Asa king of Judah had made this pit at the time of his war with Baasha king of the ten tribes.

*Jeremiah 41:10 Then Ishmael carried away captive all the remainder of the people who were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people who remained in Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the children of Ammon-* The daughters of Zedekiah were high value captives and would have been high on the list for deportation. The fact they were allowed to remain in the land was another sign of Yahweh's grace; but that grace was spurned and abused by Ishmael in that he tried to take them out of the land, to Ammon.

*Jeremiah 41:11 But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done-* These military commanders were committed to taking Jeremiah's advice and surrendering to Babylon, in recognition of their personal sins against Yahweh and the rightness of the Babylonian domination. What Ishmael had done appeared to totally destroy the potential to do that, as they would have assumed the Babylonians would now kill them and the possibility of such surrender and repentance was now impossible. Hence their great anger with Ishmael.

*Jeremiah 41:12 Then they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon-* This was only a mile north of Mizpah. the "pool of Gibeon" of 2 Sam. 2:13.

*Jeremiah 41:13 Now it happened that when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces who were with him, then they were glad-* Again we see the power of influence of just one man. Those with him realized the folly of his actions and were glad to see the opposition to them.

*Jeremiah 41:14 So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned about and returned and went to Johanan the son of Kareah-* Again a play is made upon the words for repentance, turning around and turning back to God.

*Jeremiah 41:15 But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the children of Ammon-* We wonder if those eight men were in fact Ammonites, as Ishmael appears to have been an agent of the king of Ammon, hoping to use him in order to establish himself as some kind of ruler of Judah.

*Jeremiah 41:16 Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon-* These women were the daughters of the king; they were high value captives, along with the military leaders and eunuchs, the former leadership. They had been preserved in the land by grace, rather than

being taken captive to Babylon. To leave the land was therefore a denial of that grace.

*Jeremiah 41:17 And they departed, and lived in Geruth Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt- Or, the sheepfolds of Chimham. They ought not to have even thought of going into Egypt, but should have trusted Yahweh's further grace to be shown to them, despite the foolish provocation of the Babylonians by Ishmael; see on :16; Jer. 42:2.*

*Jeremiah 41:18 Because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor over the land- Jeremiah was to assure them that in fact God's grace would continue to them through the grace of Nebuchadnezzar; he would not take revenge by slaying all Judah as they feared (Jer. 42:12). Fear is so often based upon lack of faith; and such fear can become gripping and all consuming. This fear of certain revenge proving unfounded, by God's grace, is what Jacob learnt after his sons pillaged Shechem. The surrounding tribes did not attack and destroy him, as he had thought would inevitably follow.*

## Jeremiah Chapter 42

*Jeremiah 42:1 Then all the captains of the forces, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiiah, and all the people from the least even unto the greatest, came near-* These people appeared to have had faith and spirituality, enough to intend surrendering to the Babylonians in recognition of their sins; see on Jer. 41:11. And yet now they lost their faith in saving grace; they thought grace surely couldn't extend this far, in preserving them from the Babylonians whom Ishmael had so provoked by killing some of their soldiers along with Gedaliah, their appointed ruler of the land. This ability to believe in Divine grace only so far... is typical of our struggles too.

*Jeremiah 42:2 And said to Jeremiah the prophet, Please let our supplication be presented before you, and pray for us to Yahweh your God, even for all this remnant; for we are left but a few of many, as your eyes do see us-* They asked for prayers and direction, but they were already assembled and prepared to go to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians whom Ishmael had so foolishly offended (Jer. 41:17). We too can pray and yet already have our mind made up as to what we shall do. We likewise note the human desire to ask someone else to pray for us. There is something within us which makes us shy away from the possibility of real personal engagement with God Almighty; we would prefer some system of religion, someone else to pray for me... rather than engage directly with Him.

*Jeremiah 42:3 That Yahweh your God may show us the way in which we should walk, and the thing that we should do-* As noted on :2, they had already decided that the way they should walk was to Egypt. Any other possibility seemed to them to risk certain death or captivity. We too can rule out any options apart from those we see immediately before us, and faith is about accepting those other options when they are presented by the Father. "The way in which we should walk" is the repeated phrase used of Israel's exodus from Egypt (Dt. 1:31,33; 8:2 etc.). Likewise the request to be shown what they should do or "make" is framed in terms of the instructions given Israel in the desert (Ex. 18:20). But the crucial difference in their case was that they were seeking to return to Egypt; whereas the way Israel had been shown had been out of Egypt. We too can quote Biblical precedent but get it all so wrong, as we are simply using those ideas to justify our own path.

*Jeremiah 42:4 Then Jeremiah the prophet said to them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray to Yahweh your God according to your words; and it shall happen that whatever thing Yahweh shall answer you, I will declare it to you; I will keep nothing back from you-* We pass through one experience to prepare us for another. He had tempted not to reveal everything to Zedekiah; but here he likewise must hide or "keep back" nothing. The message he had for them was to be directly opposed to what they were expecting and wanting to hear. Earlier he had been forbidden to pray for the people; and yet now he is confident that his prayer will be answered. But the idea may have been not to pray in an intercessory sense.

*Jeremiah 42:5 Then they said to Jeremiah, Yahweh be a true and faithful witness among us, if we don't do according to all the word with which Yahweh your God shall send you to us-* The implication was that if God was to reveal something to them through His word, then it was axiomatic that they must do accordingly. God is a witness over His word, as Jeremiah's prophecy began by pointing out. Our interaction with His word is likewise monitored; it can be no academic study or amassing of information. We are to live accordingly.

*Jeremiah 42:6 Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of Yahweh our God to whom we send you; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of Yahweh our God-* The Jews left in the land after the Babylonian invasion begged Jeremiah to tell them God's word: "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord" (Jer. 42:5,6). But when they heard His words, their response was: "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16,17). Their apparent zeal for Bible study came to nothing when the results were inconvenient to them (and we can take a lesson from this). But I wonder whether they actually said "We will certainly do whatsoever goeth forth out of *our* mouth"? Maybe they did; but perhaps this is what their rejection of *God's* word was tantamount to, and therefore this is the way their words are recorded.

*Jeremiah 42:7 It happened that after ten days the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah-* God tells Jeremiah not to pray for them as He won't hear him; but then Jeremiah does pray and God hears and changes His mind as a result of this

(Jer. 42:7,10). The ten day period was perhaps to help them prepare themselves for the unpopular message. As the days went by, their natural reaction would have been to get going for Egypt as soon as possible, given their fear of Babylonian revenge for the murders committed by Ishmael. The delayed response was therefore to get them used to the idea of remaining in the land.

*Jeremiah 42:8 Then called he Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest-* "Johanan" means 'God's grace', but he seems not to have believed that grace could extend so far as saving him from the offended Babylonians. Jeremiah called all the people, because he felt that remaining in the land was connected with their salvation; he didn't want any decisions made merely by the leadership, but for all individually to make their choices.

*Jeremiah 42:9 And said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel to whom you sent me to present your supplication before Him-* The people had presented a supplication to Jeremiah (the same words are used in :2), but Jeremiah stresses that the supplication has been presented before God. They perhaps really wanted Jeremiah's blessing on their proposed migration to Egypt; whereas Jeremiah was reminding them that their requests had really been taken by him before the presence of Almighty God. The wonder of prayer can easily be lost upon us. The same term is also found in Jer. 36:7, where the hope was that the people would "present their supplication before Yahweh and repent". But they were instead asking Him if they could run away to Egypt. The personal sense of repentance and confession just wasn't there.

*Jeremiah 42:10 If you will still live in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I grieve over the distress that I have brought on you-* God had promised to build and plant them in a restored, Messianic kingdom in Israel (Jer. 31:28; 42:10; Ez. 36:36). But this was all conditional upon them continuing to obey His voice, otherwise He would change His plans (Jer. 18:9,10). Jeremiah had been given the power to speak the words of both destruction and building and planting (Jer. 1:10). They who remained in the land were the "evil figs" of Jer. 24; but God was prepared to act differently, so eager was He to reestablish the Kingdom.

If Judah had remained in the land and not fled to Egypt, God would have repented of the evil He had promised, and would there and then have restored the land and rebuilt Jerusalem (Jer. 42:10 cp. Zech. 6:15); the whole restoration from Babylon would never have happened. But Israel would not. And yet the whole restoration exercise, as it happened, brought glory to God through the faith and spirituality of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. Behold once again 'Divine ecology'. God was prepared to relent (Jer. 18:8; 26:3,13,19; 42:10), and yet He says in Jer. 4:28 that He will not. This is not self-contradiction, but rather a reflection of the depth of how God's compassion is finally greater than His judgment of sin. The whole mental and emotional trauma made God weary of all the relenting, so deeply did He feel it (Jer. 15:6).

*Jeremiah 42:11 Don't be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; don't be afraid of him, says Yahweh: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand-* "Don't be afraid of the face of..." (Heb.) uses the very same words that were used to encourage Jeremiah to resist and not fear his opponents. As he had overcome all the faces of his opponents through obedience to God's word, so all Judah could have followed Jeremiah's personal example. This is indeed how the preacher must be; the word is to become flesh in us. As Jeremiah was not afraid before the faces of opponents, so Judah were to be like him before the Babylonians. See on Jer. 41:17,18. Although they were the "evil figs" of Jer.24, God sought to assure them of His change of plan concerning them; "I [Yahweh] am with you to save you" is very much the idea of Yehoshua, Jesus, Yahweh is our Saviour. Just as He had caused the surrounding tribes not to destroy Jacob after the pillaging of Shechem, so He would preserve Judah from the revenge of the Babylonians for the foolishness of Ishmael.

*Jeremiah 42:12 I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you, and cause you to return to your own land-* The experience of God's grace, mercy and acceptance was to be reflected through the king of Babylon choosing likewise not to take vengeance upon them, when he legitimately could have done so, after what Ishmael had done. We see here the struggle to believe in grace and mercy which is the root reason for the Gospel's rejection by men. The king would have caused them to return from where they were then located, perhaps already well on the way to Egypt, back to their own land.

*Jeremiah 42:13 But if you say, We will not dwell in this land; so that you don't obey the voice of Yahweh your God-* Those who don't want to be in God's Kingdom won't be; and all those who love the Lord's appearing will be accepted by Him. By refusing to dwell in the land, they were disobeying God' saving purpose; and so they would not be in God's Kingdom and would be condemned (:16).

*Jeremiah 42:14 Saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell-* Jeremiah knew this was what they were thinking, and so did God. The choice of Egypt / the world is often made on the basis of unproven assumptions and images in the mind- e.g. that there, they would not lack bread and would not be at risk of war. These assumptions were and are so often false.

*Jeremiah 42:15 Now therefore hear the word of Yahweh, O remnant of Judah: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, If you indeed set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to live there-* They had set their faces, hardened themselves psychologically, and therefore their request for God's word of guidance about their migration was inappropriate. And worse, they had set their faces against the will and intention of God for them. This is the difficulty of being truly humble before God's word; resigning all we once had hoped or assumed to be true, all our natural value systems and assumptions... before His, as they are expressed in His word.

*Jeremiah 42:16 Then it shall happen, that the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are afraid, shall follow close behind you there in Egypt; and there you shall die-* As noted on :14, they were assuming that they would be free from famine and fear of war in Egypt. But this was not at all to be the case. The sword and famine destroying them in the land of Judah had been threatened them for their sins; they were only alive by grace. And yet they thought that by fleeing to Egypt they could escape their first condemnation, and not be judged by sword or famine. The grace available to them was that they could stay in the land of Judah and not experience the promised judgments. By fleeing to another land, there was no such guarantee. The truth was that they were not truly repentant, not really awed by God's grace, and loved Egypt / the world far more than the things of God's Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 42:17 So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go into Egypt to live there: they shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring on them-* As explained on :16, sword, famine and plague were the judgments upon Judah for their sin. Those judgments would be lifted if they remained in the land to allow God's grace to work further and prepare them to be part of His restored Kingdom. But running off to Egypt was simply opting out of God's program, thinking that the world / Egypt could save them from the judgments which they deserved. Egypt had been demonstrated as unable to help them during the time of the Babylonian siege; but such mental habits and tendencies to always trust in Egypt were hard to break.

*Jeremiah 42:18 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: As My anger and My wrath has been poured forth on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so shall My wrath be poured forth on you, when you shall enter into Egypt; and you shall be an object of horror and an astonishment, a curse and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more-* They themselves had been inhabitants of Jerusalem; for the group included the eunuchs and the king's daughters. They ought to have partaken in the pouring out of wrath upon Jerusalem; they had only not experienced it by God's grace. They therefore ought to obey Him now that He tells them where to be and where to remain in order to further avoid judgment. But the grace in saving them was apparently in vain, because they still sought salvation in Egypt and not Yahweh. God's wrath was only not poured upon Jerusalem because they had shown some humility (cp. 2 Chron. 12:7); but now they were hardening themselves in their assumptions about salvation in Egypt just had to be right.

*Jeremiah 42:19 Yahweh has spoken concerning you, remnant of Judah, Don't you go into Egypt: know certainly that I have testified to you this day-* Going into Egypt has nearly always been a bad move by God's children; they were expected to perceive those precedents from history. God's plan with them was clear and not open to interpretation- they were not to go into Egypt, not to do that which was the natural reaction and which seemed the logical path.

*Jeremiah 42:20 For you have dealt deceitfully against your own souls; for you sent me to Yahweh your God saying, Pray for us to Yahweh our God; and according to all that Yahweh our God shall say, so declare to us, and we will do it-* "Dealt deceitfully" is a phrase nearly always used in the prophets about the effect of false teachers and idols deceiving the people (Jer. 23:13,32; 50:6; Ez. 14:11 etc.). It could be that they had other prophets, false ones, telling them to go to Egypt; and they wished for the "OK" from Yahweh as well. Perhaps that was all their approach to Jeremiah amounted to.

*Jeremiah 42:21 and I have this day declared it to you; but you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh your God in anything for which He has sent me to you-* Their disobedience is not recorded here, but is found in Jer. 44.

*Jeremiah 42:22 Now therefore know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place where you desire to go to live there-* The judgment of Jerusalem by sword, famine and plague had been ameliorated, by grace; these people had avoided it. But their refusal of grace and the Divine plan of salvation meant that they would have to experience it, and this therefore was to happen to them in Egypt. The Babylonian invasion of Egypt brought it about. The simple lesson is that no attempt to avoid God's judgments can ever work out. It is for us to repent and accept our worthiness of them, rather than cleverly seek to avoid them.

## Jeremiah Chapter 43

*Jeremiah 43:1 It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking to all the people all the words of Yahweh their God, with which Yahweh their God had sent him to them, even all these words-* The response of the people was immediate; they allowed themselves no time to meditate, but just followed their gut reaction of not accepting God's message because it was not what they wanted to hear.

*Jeremiah 43:2 then spoke Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah, and Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the proud men, saying to Jeremiah, You speak falsely: Yahweh our God has not sent you to say, You shall not go into Egypt to live there-* As explained through Jer. 42. these people had set their hearts and faces on going to Egypt, and their enquiry of Yahweh was simply seeking His confirmation of their own hunches and desires. When they didn't receive this, they sought to get out of things by simply denying Jeremiah's Divine inspiration. Naturally this begs the question as to why they had asked for Yahweh's word through him, if they considered him uninspired. We see here the root reason why people disbelieve the Bible as Divinely inspired- it interferes too much with their own preferred way of life and thought.

*Jeremiah 43:3 but Baruch the son of Neriah sets you on against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death, and carry us away captive to Babylon-* Baruch was Jeremiah's secretary, so maybe they were implying that these words had been written by Baruch but had not actually come from Jeremiah himself. This is typical of how those who don't want to accept God's word will try to find all manner of problems with the mechanism of inspiration; when the root issue is their refusal to accept any Divine word which goes against their own gut desires.

*Jeremiah 43:4 So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, didn't obey the voice of Yahweh, to dwell in the land of Judah-* They of course had denied the inspiration of Jeremiah to the point that they considered these words just the uninspired words of Baruch, Jeremiah's secretary. But the reality was that they were being disobedient to nothing less than the "voice of Yahweh".

*Jeremiah 43:5 But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to live in the land of Judah-* These people had been restored to the land as some kind of incipient fulfillment of the prophecies of restoration. To take them off from the land to Egypt was to disallow that potential restoration of "the remnant of Judah".

*Jeremiah 43:6 the men, and the women, and the children, and the king's daughters, and every person who Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan; and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah-* Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch surely could have refused to move to Egypt. Jeremiah had been offered a luxury retirement in Babylon, underwritten by none less than the king of Babylon personally. But he died in poverty and perhaps of famine, without any respect, in Egypt... just because of his huge devotion to God's apostate people, willing to try to bring restoration even to the condemned... even at the cost of his own life and happiness.

*Jeremiah 43:7 and they came into the land of Egypt; for they didn't obey the voice of Yahweh: and they came to Tahpanhes-* This was a border town, whose inhabitants had not been kind of Judah previously (Jer. 2:16).

*Jeremiah 43:8 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying-* This was as it were one last appeal before the people officially entered into Egypt; for Tahpanhes was the border.

*Jeremiah 43:9 Take great stones in your hand, and hide them in mortar in the brick work, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah-* This would only have been possible if the palace was crumbling; which would have served to warn them of the waning power of Pharaoh.

*Jeremiah 43:10 and tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take*

*Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon-* This would have been by Angelic action. The same phrase is used of God sending forth an Angel to take a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:7,40).

*My servant-* Judah liked to imagine that *they* were the "servant of Yahweh" spoken of in Isaiah's recent prophecies. But this didn't make them God's people and therefore inviolate from judgment. Nebuchadnezzar was also Yahweh's servant but would be judged for his actions.

*And will set his throne on these stones that I have hidden; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them-* They would not escape the King of Babylon; he would spread his pavilion over the stones hidden in the palace of Pharaoh at Tahpanhes.

*Jeremiah 43:11 He shall come, and shall strike the land of Egypt; such as are for death shall be put to death, and such as are for captivity to captivity, and such as are for the sword to the sword-* This is a quotation from Jer. 15:2. This is what could have happened had they received their judgment in Jerusalem. By grace they were spared that, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so.

*Jeremiah 43:12 I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captive: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment-* When refugees arrive in a host country, totally at the peoples' mercy, they scarcely start condemning the people. But Jeremiah had to inform Egypt that Nebuchadnezzar would soon "pick clean the land of Egypt like a shepherd picking lice from his clothing and then depart unmolested" (Jer. 43:12). Our position with this world, and our message to it, is no different in essence. See on Jer. 51:59.

*And he shall go forth from there in peace-* This can be read as meaning that it was God's intention that Babylon too should find peace with Him; Babylon's peace was to be that of Judah (see on Jer. 29:7).

*Jeremiah 43:13 He shall also break the pillars of Beth Shemesh that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of Egypt shall he burn with fire-* Beth Shemesh is 'house of the sun' and probably refers to Heliopolis, which has the same meaning. "The pillars" refer to an avenue of obelisks in front of the temple erected by Thothmes III (BC 1500), one of which remain, and the other is "Cleopatra's Needle," placed on the Thames Embankment in London in 1878.

## Jeremiah Chapter 44

*Jeremiah 44:1* The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who lived in the land of Egypt, who lived at Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis and in the country of Pathros, saying- The Jews may well have gone to live with other Jews who had settled there previously. Most of these places [excluding Pathros] were near the border with Judah, as if they were looking to return to Judah once things had stabilized. Woe had already been declared upon these towns where the disobedient Jews went to live after the Babylonian invasion of Judah; from the prophecy of Jer. 46:14, they ought to have already been aware of what Jeremiah declared to them- that even there in Egypt, the Babylonians would come and judge them.

*Jeremiah 44:2* Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: You have seen all the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwells therein- That evil came because of their idolatry; and yet they had fled to Egypt and were continuing in such idolatry (:8). Their attitude was therefore that it was good fortune that they had avoided the judgments for idolatry; and they were eagerly carrying on with it. They refused to see that God's grace was trying to lead them to repentance; and that judgment for sin will fall, regardless of where on the globe one is situated.

*Jeremiah 44:3* because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, to serve other gods that they didn't know, neither they, nor you, nor your fathers- Not only is the logic of choosing God's way so powerful, but the way of the flesh is not satisfying. Sin became a weariness to Israel even before they reaped the punishment for it (Is. 57:10); their mind was alienated from the lovers they chose; they left the one they left the God of Israel for (Ez. 23:17). They always wanted *new* gods; they were never satisfied with their idols. And it seems that now the same was happening; they were looking to adopt new gods they had found in Egypt.

*Jeremiah 44:4* However I sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them saying, Oh, don't do this abominable thing that I hate!- A love as strong as God's is going to also elicit the emotion of hatred and anger when that love is rejected and abused. He "hated" (s.w.) Judah's insincere worship and relationship with Him (Is. 1:14; 61:8; Jer. 44:4). But it is hard to separate the sin from the sinner. That distinction may be helpful for us in order to avoid judging others too personally, but God it seems doesn't make that decision. He gave Israel into the hands of those who hated her (s.w. Ez. 16:27,37) and in that sense He hated her. The feelings of hatred which Hosea had for Gomer due to her abuse of His love were those of God for Israel: "There I hated them" (Hos. 9:15). God is not simply "love" in the abstract. He is love for real, with all the emotion and psychological complex which goes along with love; and this will include hatred if that love is abused.

*Jeremiah 44:5* But they didn't listen nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods- Inclining or humbling / bowing down the ear means that true response to God's word ought to be a humbling experience. We cannot come away from engagement with God's word without being humbled. And this very phrase is used of how God bows down / inclines His ear to human prayer (2 Kings 19:16; Ps. 17:6; 31:2; 71:2 and often). We see here the mutuality possible between God and man, and the interplay between Bible reading and God's response to our prayers. We speak to God in line with our understanding of His word, and He responds to our prayers. Bible reading and prayer therefore mesh together in the Christian life, as part of the upward spiral of spirituality. God is not silent to our prayers- He reveals Himself in response through His word.

*Jeremiah 44:6* Therefore My wrath and My anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day- They had failed to recognize that God is serious about judging sin; they thought that because they had so far escaped that judgment therefore it would not come. Distance was no object to God; the fact they were in Egypt didn't mean they were hidden from Him or that judgment could only come or happen whilst they were communicant members of the temple cult in Jerusalem. Judgment will come- and resignation from a church or from God *in toto* , moving out of the area... will not stop judgment coming.

*Jeremiah 44:7 Therefore now thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Why do you commit great evil against your own souls, to cut off from yourselves man and woman, infant and nursing child out of the midst of Judah, to leave yourselves none remaining-* Their sin was against their own souls. Likewise the rejected are witnesses against themselves (Is. 44:9; Mt. 23:31). Herein lies the crass folly and illogicality of sin. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel: "Wherefore commit ye this great evil against your souls [i.e. yourselves], to cut off from you man and woman...that ye might cut yourselves off" (Jer. 44:7,8, cp. how Jerusalem cut her own hair off in Jer. 7:29). In the same passage, Yahweh is the one who does the cutting off (Jer. 44:11); but they had cut themselves off. Likewise as they had kindled fire on their roofs in offering sacrifices to Baal, so Yahweh through the Babylonians would set fire to those same houses (Jer. 32:29). Thus Israel were the ones who had kindled the fire of Yahweh's condemnation (Jer. 17:4). Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4).

*Jeremiah 44:8 in that you provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to live; that you may be cut off, and that you may be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?-* The Jews considered that they had as it were resigned from Yahweh, so they were free to worship as they wished. But this wasn't the case. We cannot resign from Him. They would become a reproach and curse for this, and thus dishonour Yahweh. We note again that the essence of idolatry is a trust in the work of our own hands. This is what makes idolatry an abiding issue in the lives of God's people.

*Jeremiah 44:9 Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?-* We note the emphasis upon the sins of the women (:17,21). In those days, religion was largely a hobby for men, and the women followed their husbands' religion where and when required. But we see here that the women are held personally accountable; for God values men and women equally, desiring that each person exercise a personal conscience toward Him.

*Jeremiah 44:10 They are not humbled even to this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes, that I set before you and before your fathers-* To walk in God's laws was to be the result of their humbled repentance. This is one reason why we have Divine laws- to provide a channel through which we can express that intangible and non-specific love of God which we feel upon repentance.

*Jeremiah 44:11 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set My face against you for evil, even to cut off all Judah-* See on :7. All would be destroyed; but the same chapter speaks of a remnant that would not be (:14,28). This is the Bible paradox of God's love of Israel and desire for their redemption.

*Jeremiah 44:12 I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to live there, and they shall all be consumed; in the land of Egypt shall they fall; they shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine; they shall die, from the least even to the greatest, by the sword and by the famine; and they shall be an object of horror, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach-* This is an allusion to Jer. 15:2. This is what could have happened had they received their judgment in Jerusalem. By grace they were spared that, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so.

*Jeremiah 44:13 For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the plague-* As noted on :12, their attempt to avoid Divine judgment by living in Egypt was not going to work. There can be a sense that we can resign from everything to do with God's truth; and live with no sense of judgment to come. These Jews who fled to Egypt are proof that this is not the case. God's grip is strong upon us and He wishes us for His Kingdom till the day we die.

*Jeremiah 44:14 so that none of the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall*

*escape or be left to return into the land of Judah, to which they will have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return save such as shall escape-* They thought they could forget about the things of Yahweh once they were in Egypt. But they were to face condemnation there, and in their time of condemnation, they desperately wanted to return to their land [cp. the Kingdom]- but it was all too late. Cain is another type of the rejected- instead of going as far away from Divine things as possible after his condemnation, he went to live on the east of Eden- where the cherubim were, guarding the barred entry to God's paradise (Gen. 4:16). This desire to be in the Kingdom but it being too late is the 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' the Lord speaks about; a mental torment absolutely self inflicted.

*Jeremiah 44:15 Then all the men who knew that their wives burned incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, even all the people who lived in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah saying-* Pathros was in the far south of Egypt, and may have included Jews who had been resident in Egypt for some time. Being so far south, they were confident that Jeremiah's prophecies that the Babylonians would find them even there would for sure be proved untrue.

*Jeremiah 44:16 As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of Yahweh, we will not listen to you-* This is rank disobedience. But they phrase it in terms of there perhaps being a difference between the words of Yahweh and those of Jeremiah. These are the words Jeremiah ("you") had spoken, not from Yahweh but only "in the name of Yahweh". This kind of petty doubting of the process of Divine inspiration is often deployed by those who simply don't want to accept the demands of His word upon them personally.

*Jeremiah 44:17 But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil-* See on :19; Jer. 7:18. The Jews left in the land after the Babylonian invasion begged Jeremiah to tell them God's word: "Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of the Lord" (Jer. 42:5,6). But when they heard His words, their response was: "As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee. But we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth" (Jer. 44:16,17). Their apparent zeal for Bible study came to nothing when the results were inconvenient to them (and we can take a lesson from this). But I wonder whether they actually said "We will certainly do whatsoever goeth forth out of *our* mouth"? Maybe they did; but perhaps this is what their rejection of *God's* word was tantamount to, and therefore this is the way their words are recorded.

*Jeremiah 44:18 But since we left off burning incense to the queen of the sky, and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine-* As noted on Jer. 43:11, the consumption by sword and famine was because they were in Egypt. They had been spared this whilst in the land of Israel. By grace they had been spared death by sword and famine in Jerusalem, and then by grace again, they would have been spared it at the hands of the Babylonians who were tempted to revenge the murders performed by Ishmael. But since they were ungrateful for that great grace shown, then those judgments would catch up with them. Fleeing to Egypt would not save from Divine judgment; only repentantly casting themselves in humility upon His grace would do so. Their complaint that they had received those judgments, finally, in Egypt... was inappropriate in the extreme.

*Jeremiah 44:19 When we burned incense to the queen of the sky, and poured out drink offerings to her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her, without our husbands?-* It was this very behaviour which had brought the Babylonians upon Jerusalem (Jer. 7:18). "The queen of heaven" was a Babylonian fertility god, otherwise called Ishtar, shaped like the moon or the planet Venus. It was the god of female fertility, hence the note that the women and children were a large part of its worship. Each female devotee was expected to sleep with the male cult prostitutes of this cult. And then sacrifice one of their children to it. No wonder this so upset God, seeing that He was the source of Israel's fertility, and their children were born to Him and not to the supposed queen of heaven. The women later protested that they were impenitent of this worship of the queen of heaven, and they did so with the full blessing of their husbands; this was significant, seeing that the cult involved sleeping with other men and offering their children to Ishtar.

*Jeremiah 44:20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men, and to the women, even to all the people who had given him an answer, saying-* It is twice emphasized that Jeremiah replied "to all the people". None could claim they had not heard God's response.

*Jeremiah 44:21 The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, didn't Yahweh remember it, and didn't it come into His mind?-* There was the idea that God forgot their sin; that that was all back there and back then, but now they had moved to Egypt, all was different. We too can reason the same way, wrongly assuming that time and geography make a pseudo atonement for our sins. God had been hurt deeply by their idolatry, and it continued to come into His mind. Judgment was going to come for it.

*Jeremiah 44:22 So that Yahweh could no longer endure you, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which you have committed; therefore your land has become a desolation, an astonishment and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day-* Yahweh had been bearing their sin ("s.w. "endure"), but there came a point where this was no longer appropriate if they were continuing in those sins.

*Jeremiah 44:23 Because you have burned incense, and because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil has happened to you, as it is this day-* What was worse was that this group had come to Jeremiah seeking God's word, and apparently had some interest in obeying it. But there was a willfulness in their sin which made their judgment inevitable. The evil done to the land of Judah "happened to you, as it is this day"; they were wrong to think that by running away to Egypt, they had avoided Divine judgment.

*Jeremiah 44:24 Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt-* There is strange emphasis on all the people being addressed, including the women. This reflects God's inclusive approach, recognizing the women as well as the men were guilty and likewise also capable of repentance. It is not God's way to punish a majority just for the sins of their leadership; the entire community were addressed and thereby were responsible.

*Jeremiah 44:25 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, You and your wives have both spoken with your mouths, and with your hands have fulfilled it saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her-* Their hands fulfilled what their mouths spoke in that those hands formed the cakes to the queen of heaven, and performed the rituals.

*Establish then your vows, and perform your vows-* God will confirm people in the path they wish to take both for good and bad, hence we are to pray "lead us not into temptation".

*Jeremiah 44:26 Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by My great name, says Yahweh, that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt saying, As the Lord Yahweh lives-* This implies that every single Jew in Egypt was to be killed. Such threats of total destruction of every Jew in Judah had been made earlier by the prophets, and yet not carried out in the end because of God's way of remembering mercy in the midst of wrath. And it was to be the same here; the Assuan papyri show that the Egyptian Jews in the century following were a flourishing community and were worshippers of Yahweh and not idolaters. Perhaps it was this level of turning toward Yahweh which meant that God changed these threatened judgments.

*Jeremiah 44:27 Behold, I watch over them for evil, and not for good; and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until they are all gone-* The language of total destruction is immediately ameliorated in :28, when we read that some of them would return into Judah.

*Jeremiah 44:28 Those who escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall know whose word*

*shall stand, Mine, or theirs-* This is proof enough that the language of total destruction of all Jews in Egypt was not going to literally happen.

*Jeremiah 44:29 This shall be the sign to you, says Yahweh, that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words shall surely stand against you for evil-* Egypt was given into the hand of their enemies so that Judah might learn something from this. We see the condemnation of others in order to warn us. There is a gap between the statement of judgment, and its execution. In that gap we can repent and change the otherwise inevitable outcomes. The problems of the Pharaoh Hophra (see on :30) were to be a sign to the Jews that the Babylonian judgment would surely come upon them.

*Jeremiah 44:30 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of those who seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy, and sought his life-* All that we know of the fate of Hophra is derived from Herodotus (2:169), 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".

## Jeremiah Chapter 45

*Jeremiah 45:1 The message that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying-* The reference is to the words written in the roll or scroll of Jer. 36:1. The book of Jeremiah isn't chronological but thematic; here, the theme which continues from Jer. 44 is that of Baruch, who went with Jeremiah to die with the apostate Jews in Egypt.

*Jeremiah 45:2 Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, to you, Baruch-* God's word to Baruch begins with a quotation from Baruch's own feelings (:3).

*Jeremiah 45:3 You said, Woe is me now! For Yahweh has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest-* In the historical record of Jer. 36, Baruch appears to just do what Jeremiah tells him in writing the record of Jeremiah's words. But this led him to risk death. The "pain" was how he like Jeremiah felt the pain of the condemned people; but he experienced additional "sorrow", reflected in his restless groaning, perhaps related to fear of imprisonment and death for his work in transcribing the prophecies. The Father was comforting Baruch that He knows human words, even those said quietly in frustration. But even in that 'finding no rest' he was fellowshiping Israel's experiences for breaking the covenant, such was his identity with them (s.w. Dt. 28:65).

*Jeremiah 45:4 You shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up; and this will be so in the whole land-* Jeremiah's words had the power to break down and pluck up; and indeed the words he had transcribed would come about. There was no way to stop that; the time for changing outcomes had passed.

*Jeremiah 45:5 Do you seek great things for yourself? Don't seek them; for, behold, I will bring evil on all flesh, says Yahweh; but your life will I give to you for a prey in all places where you go-* Baruch, the faithful scribe of Jeremiah 36, had to be reminded later to stop seeking great things for himself. His life would be to him "for a prey", literally, as booty taken from a conquered city. This was and is the great paradox- that surrender, acceptance of defeat, was the great spiritual victory. Moving to Egypt to live with a condemned group of Jews, with only further suffering to look forward to, meant resigning all material hopes. Clearly Baruch had his eye upon "great things" for himself, and he seems to have been upset that now he was never going to achieve them. But all such material things were to be destroyed in the day of evil upon "all flesh"; the one thing which would survive that was his life. His life, a life with God in it, was what he would salvage; and a life like that is worth losing everything material in order to gain. This is the same promise as made to Ebedmelech in Jer. 39:18. LXX "and you shall find your life" is alluded to in the Lord's promise that he who loses his life [or risks losing it] for the Lord's sake shall find it (Mt. 10:39; 16:25). The reward for Baruch and Ebedmelech was not just that they would save their physical life, but that they would find their true life. They thereby stand representative of us all.

## Jeremiah Chapter 46

Jeremiah 46:1 *The word of Yahweh which came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations-* Ezekiel also at this point gave prophecies against Egypt and the surrounding nations. As noted on Ez. 29-32, many of the details didn't come true at that time. The essence will do in the last days. But the prophecies were part of a wider potential scenario in which Judah would repent, as would Israel who were already in captivity; and the nations conquered by Babylon would also come to "know Yahweh", to come into relationship with Him. But this didn't work out as hoped; and so the application of these prophecies has been transferred and reapplied to the last days.

Jeremiah 46:2 *Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah-* The significance of the victory is that it was a sure sign to Judah that their trust upon Egypt was futile; now Egyptian military power had been demonstrated useless. God was, for now, on the side of Babylon; they were His servants, and resistance to them was futile.

Jeremiah 46:3 *Prepare the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle!*- This was the cry of "The Egyptian officers" (GNB).

Jeremiah 46:4 *Harness the horses, rise up, you horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail-* Egypt is portrayed as replete with all the latest military technology and human strength, all of which was seen by Judah as so attractive, but by God as so abhorrent and meaningless.

Jeremiah 46:5 *Why have I seen it?*- Now we have God's perspective, how He saw things. "'But what do I see?' asks the LORD" (GNB). However, this could be another interjection from Jeremiah, complaining that the visions which he had to preach, about violence and judgment, were quite against the grain of his sensitive soul (Jer. 46:5 RV; 47:6). The fact that true preaching is a carrying of the cross explains why Paul felt that the fact that to preach what he did went right against his natural grain, was the proof that indeed a "dispensation of the Gospel" had been given to him. Likewise Jeremiah complained. There is therefore no such person as a natural preacher in the ultimate sense.

*They are dismayed and are turned backward; and their mighty ones are beaten down and have fled apace, and don't look back: terror is on every side, says Yahweh-* Although the Egyptians went forward so confidently into battle, God saw them as fleeing in terror.

Jeremiah 46:6 *Don't let the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; in the north by the river Euphrates have they stumbled and fallen-* Ez. 32:31 says that Pharaoh would die in this battle. However there is no record of Pharaoh being killed at Carchemish, although the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, now housed in the British Museum, claims that Nebuchadnezzar "crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Carchemish. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat, decisively. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country". We would expect a mention of the death of Pharaoh but there is none. And the account of the battle of Carchemish here in Jer. 46:3-12 doesn't mention it either. Again we see that the prophetic scenario envisaged didn't completely come about, although the essence of it will in the last days.

Jeremiah 46:7 *Who is this who rises up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers?*- This is said in retrospect, seeing that the Egyptians are now "dismayed and turned backward" (:5). They had once been seen as the rising power, rising up as the Nile, and Judah had been attracted by this, rather than trusting in Yahweh.

Jeremiah 46:8 *Egypt rises up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers: and he says, I will rise up, I will cover the land; I will destroy cities and its inhabitants-* Egypt had its eyes upon dominating the *eretz*, "the land" promised to Abraham, including Judah. Yet Judah had sought their help against Babylon, refusing to see the obvious- that actually Egypt wanted to dominate them and destroy their cities just as Babylon was to do.

*Jeremiah 46:9 Go up, you horses; and rage, you chariots; and let the mighty ones go forth: Cush and Put, who handle the shield; and the Ludim, who handle and bend the bow-* These are the mercenaries, from various African countries, who fought for Egypt and are being sent forth. The "mighty ones", horses and chariots are portrayed in these terms to show they are a pathetic imitation of Ezekiel's cherubim, which could have fought for Judah had they trusted in Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 46:10 For that day is of the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself of His adversaries: and the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates-* Nebuchadnezzar was Yahweh's servant, and therefore the adversaries of Babylon were His adversaries; and He would destroy them. Judah's desperate trust in Egypt was therefore siding with Yahweh's enemies.

*Jeremiah 46:11 Go up into Gilead and take balm, virgin daughter of Egypt: in vain do you use many medicines; there is no healing for you-* This "daughter" may be that of :19, the daughter "who dwells in Egypt", the Jewish communities in Egypt, who were to be joined by the unfaithful Jews who later joined them under Johanan (see on Jer. 44:1). Gilead's balm was well known (Gen. 37:25; Ez. 27:17). There was balm and a physician in Gilead which could heal the sick person- but they wouldn't go to it (Jer. 8:22). The cure had been readily available- but Judah had refused to make use of it.

*Jeremiah 46:12 The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together-* This may refer to the shame of the fact that a far smaller Babylonian army of 18,000 destroyed the Egyptian army of 40,000 at Carchemish. "The mighty man" would be they of :9, the mercenaries upon whom Egypt relied.

*Jeremiah 46:13 The word that Yahweh spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon should come and strike the land of Egypt-* The language of smiting Egypt is that of the plagues (Ex. 3:20; 12:12,13 s.w.). Again there is the implicit hope that as a result of this, there would be a glorious exodus and reentry of the promised land by Judah. See on :23.

*Jeremiah 46:14 Declare in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Memphis and in Tahpanhes: say, Stand forth, and prepare; for the sword has devoured around you-* These were the very towns where the disobedient Jews went to live after the Babylonian invasion of Judah; from this prophecy, they ought to have already been aware of what Jeremiah declared to them- that even there in Egypt, the Babylonians would come and judge them (Jer. 44:1). The declaration to Egypt is effectively an appeal for repentance; as noted on :13, the predicted 'smiting' of Egypt was to be a repetition of that at the time of the Exodus. The gods of Egypt were smitten, but the smiting was ideally in order to elicit repentance. The word of judgment was as good as executed; but they were to "stand forth and prepare", a call to repentance.

*Jeremiah 46:15 Why are your strong ones swept away? They didn't stand, because Yahweh pushed them over-* GNB: "Why has your mighty god Apis fallen? The LORD has struck him down!". As at the exodus there was the 'smiting' of Egypt's gods, so again it would be. But this was all ideally intended to elicit repentance.

*Jeremiah 46:16 He made many to stumble, yes, they fell one on another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our birth, from the oppressing sword-* This speaks of the mercenaries fighting for Egypt running away to their homelands.

*Jeremiah 46:17 They cried there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by-* GNB "Give the king of Egypt a new name—'Noisy Braggart Who Missed His Chance'". As the Pharaoh at the time of the exodus was given a chance to repent, so now again (see on :13-15). As explained on Ez. 30:21, God had worked to bring about the healing of Egypt in her repentance after her first defeat by the Babylonians. But she didn't respond. Therefore Jer. 46:17 AV says of Pharaoh: "he has let the appointed time pass by". He was given a window of repentance but he refused it. The breaking of Pharaoh's arm as prophesied in Ez. 30:21 was in fact by being a staff of reed to Judah which collapsed. This was all the very opposite narrative to that which the faithless Jews at the time

wished to believe- that the strong arm of Pharaoh would save them from the Babylonians. Instead, both Judah and Egypt would collapse as it were in a heap together before the Babylonians. And from this debased state they were both intended to arise as repentant, knowing Yahweh. But they didn't.

*Jeremiah 46:18 As I live, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, so shall he come-* That is, with the same towering strength. The appeal to locations in Palestine was because those being addressed were not so much Egyptians as the Jews dwelling amongst them (:19).

*Jeremiah 46:19 You daughter who dwells in Egypt, furnish yourself to go into captivity; for Memphis shall become a desolation and shall be burnt up without inhabitant-* The daughter refers to the Jewish communities in Egypt. This ought to have been understood by the Jews who wanted to go and join the Jewish communities already existing in Memphis and elsewhere in Egypt; they were to also go into captivity. See on Jer. 44:1.

*Jeremiah 46:20 Egypt is a very beautiful heifer; but destruction out of the north has come, it has come-* GNB "Egypt is like a splendid cow, attacked by a stinging fly from the north".

*Jeremiah 46:21 Also her hired men in the midst of her are like calves of the stall; for they also are turned back, they are fled away together, they didn't stand: for the day of their calamity has come on them, the time of their visitation-* The apparent strength of Egypt was largely dependent upon their mercenaries; this prophecy emphasizes that. But Judah didn't seem to want to appreciate that. They were but "fatted calves fed in her" (LXX); they were loyal only insofar as they were fed and paid by Egypt.

*Jeremiah 46:22 The sound of it shall go like the serpent; for they shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as wood cutters-* This is just how the Babylonians came upon Jerusalem, with axes to cut down the cedarwork of the temple (Ps. 74:5,6). Judah were not to think they had cleverly escaped judgment through moving to Egypt; judgment would still come to them.

*Jeremiah 46:23 They shall cut down her forest, says Yahweh, though it can't be searched; because they are more than the locusts, and are innumerable-* Just as Egypt had been plagued by locusts (see on :13), so those plagues were to be repeated. And yet again there was therefore the hope for repentance and exodus because of that.

*Jeremiah 46:24 The daughter of Egypt shall be disappointed; she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north-* This is the daughter of :19, the Jewish daughter of Zion who lived in Egypt. They would be disappointed in Egypt; and again there is an abiding lesson. All trust in idols or in the things of Egypt, the world, will end in such disappointment, just as in due course Babylon would be disappointed in her idols (Jer. 51:17).

*Jeremiah 46:25 Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, says: Behold, I will punish Amon of No-* GNB "Amon, the god of Thebes". Egypt was to be punished by Babylon, and in due course Babylon too was to be punished (s.w. Jer. 25:12). Jeremiah's prophecies ought to have enabled God's people to see that all human strength waxes and wanes, and all finally comes to His judgment.

*And Pharaoh, and Egypt, with her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh, and those who trust in him-* Those who trusted in Egypt's idols and gods were the Jews (:24).

*Jeremiah 46:26 And I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants; and afterwards it shall be inhabited like in the days of old, says Yahweh-* GNB "But later on, people will live in Egypt again, as they did in times past. I, the LORD, have spoken". This is the language of restoration; it was clearly God's plan to restore not only His own people and land, but those of the surrounding peoples.

*Jeremiah 46:27 But don't you be afraid, Jacob My servant, neither be dismayed, Israel: for, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid-* The Jewish exiles in Egypt did indeed have something to fear and be dismayed about;

but if they were repentant, then they would be restored even from Egypt into a new kingdom of God revived in the land of Israel. In the future, they would be unafraid; and even in the face of the Babylonian attack, they could still be unafraid. If they were truly penitent and on God's side, then they could live the kingdom life there and then, just as we can. This salvation from far off must be understood in the context of how God says that He was potentially near to Judah, but they had chosen to keep Him "far off" (s.w.) in their hearts; see on Jer. 12:2;23:23. Even from that situation, God's grace could work on their hearts. They were taken "far [off]" to captivity because they had Him far from their hearts.

*Jeremiah 46:28 Don't you be afraid, O Jacob My servant, says Yahweh; for I am with you: for although I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, I will not make a full end of you-* Earlier God had threatened to make a full end, the same phrase is found in Is. 10:23 and Zeph. 1:18. But now God promises that He will not make a full end (Jer. 5:10,18; 4:27; 30:11; 46:28). God is not capricious; but His love and pity is such that He is unafraid to not do according to His wrath. In wrath God remembered mercy; or perhaps responded to some degree of repentance or intercession from a minority. And this God is our God.

*But I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished-* The frequent appeals for Judah to be "instructed" use the same word translated "punish" (Lev. 26:18). The idea was that the punishments were to be instruction; they were not the lashing out of an offended Deity. It was God's hope, even 'fantasy' would not be too strong a word, that His people would realize this, and come to say "You punished / instructed me, and I was instructed" (Jer. 31:18 s.w.). That correction / punishment was to be "in measure", the same phrase is used by Jeremiah as Judah's representative when he asked to be corrected "with justice / judgment" (Jer. 10:18). His personal reformation was to be that of Judah. The paradox is that Judah deserved total destruction, as Jeremiah and other prophets do state at times; and yet the "just" judgment was that which resulted in reformation and not total destruction. That justice involved them not being left "unpunished"; the guilty cannot be "cleared" (s.w. "unpunished"; Ex. 34:7; Nah. 1:3). That is a fundamental part of God's character. The problem was that the Jews of Jeremiah's time considered themselves "innocent" (Jer. 2:35 s.w. "unpunished"). They had to be convicted both of their sin and of God's grace, in punishing / correcting them less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13).

## Jeremiah Chapter 47

*Jeremiah 47:1 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before that Pharaoh struck Gaza-* Judah were tempted to trust in the Philistines against Babylon. But this prophecy makes the point that they were to be struck by both Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar.

*Jeremiah 47:2 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and those who dwell therein; and the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail-* The overflowing river refers to the army from the north (Jer. 46:8; Is. 8:7). That overflowing stream of Babylon was going to overflow the entire *eretz*, and that included the territory of the Philistines. It was a useless to think that Babylon could be resisted through alliances with people within the *eretz*.

*Jeremiah 47:3 At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong ones, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers don't look back to their children for feebleness of hands-* The word for the "rushing" noise of the cherubim wheels in Ezekiel is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah and the nations in the land like the Philistines, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

*Jeremiah 47:4 because of the day that comes to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains-* The connection with Tyre and Sidon is in that the Philistines were in league with them. Judah would be left without any helper (Lam. 1:7 s.w.). Yahweh alone was the helper of His people (Is. 50:7 s.w.).

*For Yahweh will destroy the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor-* Crete, the origin of the Philistines (Dt. 2:23; Am. 9:7).

*Jeremiah 47:5 Baldness has come on Gaza; Ashkelon is brought to nothing, the remnant of their valley: how long will you cut yourself?-* The cutting of themselves was in order to beg their idols to arise and help them (1 Kings 18:28). But they would not. Absolutely all human help was to be cut off; and therefore those who realized this would trust in Yahweh alone. "The remnant of their valley" is LXX "the remainder of the Anakim", or giants. Again, all human strength was to be brought to nothing; and we do well to live life in that belief today.

*Jeremiah 47:6 You sword of Yahweh, how long will it be before you be quiet? Put up yourself into your scabbard; rest, and be still-* See on Jer. 46:5. Jeremiah responds to the prophecy he has to utter against the hated Philistines by begging the Father to limit these judgments, presumably on account of their repentance: "O thou sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself into thy scabbard, rest, and be still" (Jer. 47:6). Think too of how he almost interrupts a prophecy he is giving to Israel about judgment to come by appealing for them *therefore* to repent (Jer. 4:13,14). Our handling of the prophecies of judgment to come should have a like effect upon us: they should inspire us to an inevitable witness. Each of our days cannot be just 'the same old scene' when we see the world in this way.

*Jeremiah 47:7 How can you be quiet, since Yahweh has given you a command? Against Ashkelon, and against the seashore, there has He appointed it-* This may be Jeremiah's reply to himself. These windows into Jeremiah's struggles are profound; to preach the message of God's word may well involve our struggle with it. "Quiet" is the word just used in Jer. 46:27 of how Jacob shall be "at rest" when restored; and with the Philistines also, there is the implicit hope that there will be "rest" or "quiet" once the judgments of the sword have been carried out. For they too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham.

## Jeremiah Chapter 48

*Jeremiah 48:1 Of Moab. Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Woe to Nebo! for it is laid waste-* The city, not the mountain (Num. 32:38).

*Kiriathaim is disappointed, it is taken; Misgab is put to shame and broken down-* The present tenses are used because the threatened judgments are so certain. I suggest that there is a particular address to the Jews who had taken refuge in Moab, just as the previous chapter addresses the Jews who had taken refuge in Egypt (see on :18).

*Jeremiah 48:2 The praise of Moab is no more; in Heshbon they have devised evil against her. Come, and let us cut her off from being a nation. You also, Madmen, shall be brought to silence: the sword shall pursue you-* "Heshbon" and "devised" are similar words, and so there is a word play here. Likewise "Madmen" and "brought to silence". The idea is that they had done this to themselves. Judgment is really self-inflicted and an extension of what the condemned did to themselves.

*Jeremiah 48:3 The sound of a cry from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction!-* See on :4. In Is. 16:3, Moab had been asked to accept the exiles of Judah and thus shield them from "spoiling" (s.w. NEV "desolation"). It seems that they had spoiled the Jewish refugees and not at all shielded them from the spoiling of the northern invader, both at the time of the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions. And so their attitude to their brother [for Moab and Israel were all related to Abraham] becomes the basis for their judgment. This is a continual theme, and one that will continue to our own judgment.

*Jeremiah 48:4 Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard-* Isaiah had also spoken of this crying out of Moab in their time of judgment, and it motivated him to himself cry out for them. We too will appeal to men with conviction, as Isaiah's heart cried out for Moab like a young heifer about to be slaughtered, feeling for them in what would come upon them, and desperately appealing for their repentance. Because the Moabites would cry out and their voice would be heard, "my heart shall cry out for Moab" (Is. 15:4,5,8). As the Lord Jesus is a representative Saviour, we too must feel the judgment that is to come upon others, and in that sense cry out for them as they will cry out.

*Jeremiah 48:5 For by the ascent of Luhith with continual weeping shall they go up; for at the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction-* See on :4. The same words for "cry of destruction" are found in the description of Jerusalem's fall in Zeph. 1:10. The Jews who had fled to the mountainous crags of Moab to escape Divine judgment were going to receive exactly that judgment; leaving us a lesson, that we will not avoid judgment. We need to repent of our sins, rather than psychologically try to avert judgment coming.

*Jeremiah 48:6 Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness-* As noted on :4, this is an appeal for repentance. God wanted Moab saved too. LXX has "be like a wild ass in the wilderness", which is hard to capture. Through repentance, they could avoid the capture and destruction which was otherwise inevitable.

*Jeremiah 48:7 For because you have trusted in your works and in your treasures, you also shall be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together-* Their "works" were their idols, which are repeatedly described as the works of human hands (Dt. 4:28 etc.). And this is the essence of idolatry today- a trusting in our own works. Perhaps the reference is to the valuable stones in the Chemosh idol, which was therefore going to be taken into captivity as a valuable item. But it was understood that a god of a people or town always fought for its people, and if overcome, then it as it were goes into captivity (Is. 46:1; Am. 1:15). This was the difference with Israel's God Yahweh, the God who threatened to destroy His own city and temple because of His sensitivity to His peoples' sins; the God who brought their enemies upon them.

*Jeremiah 48:8 The destroyer shall come on every city, and no city shall escape; the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed; as Yahweh has spoken-* The reference is to the Jordan valley and to the tableland of Moab. The Hebrew phrase for 'none escaping' has been used by Jeremiah in describing the Babylonian judgment (Jer. 34:3; 38:18; Ez. 17:18). The Jews (see on :18) thought they could escape by running to Moab; but it is foolish to think we

can play games with God.

*Jeremiah 48:9 May wings be given to Moab, that she may fly and get her away: and her cities shall become a desolation, without any to dwell therein-* This may be Jeremiah's interjection, wishing that Moab would take the way out- which was through repentance and turning to Yahweh. The "wings" of the mighty cherubim were there to deliver God's people, or whoever trusted in Him.

*Jeremiah 48:10 Cursed is he who does the work of Yahweh negligently; and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood-* If Babylon was negligent in judging Moab, they would be cursed.

*Jeremiah 48:11 Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remains in him, and his scent is not changed-* The idea therefore is that by Moab going into captivity, their scent and taste would change; in other words, they would repent. The same figure is used of how the captivity of Judah was likewise to bring about their repentance (Zeph. 1:12). This was in view throughout all these judgments, that the nations around Israel would repent. We are baptized into the Name of Jesus, and bear that Name in the eyes of men. The Hebrew concept of a name meant really a renown, an understanding of the person. The Bride comments that "thy name is as ointment poured forth" (Song 1:3), likening the name to the smell of perfume. The "scent" of a nation is likewise their reputation, the message they give out (Jer. 48:11; Hos. 14:7). We are the savour of Christ (2 Cor. 2:16), we bear His Name, and therefore anyone carrying the Name is thereby a witness to Him.

*Jeremiah 48:12 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will send to him those who pour off, and they shall pour him off; and they shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles in pieces-* There was to be no possibility for Moab to return to their former taste and scent (:11); the bottles of wine themselves would be broken. Yet this was all because God wanted them to radically change.

*Jeremiah 48:13 Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence-* The idol cult at Bethel was used by Judah too (Am. 5:5). Israel's repentance and restoration was to signal that of the surrounding nations like Moab (see on :11). But they sadly failed. Clearly enough, God's ideal intention even in Old Testament times was for the Gentiles to respond to the Hope of Israel. The aim of God's judgments upon Moab were so that they might be ashamed of their idols, and that their "flavour" might be changed to be more pleasing to Israel's God (:11); see on :28.

*Jeremiah 48:14 How do you say, We are mighty men, and valiant men for the war?-* The present tense is used; they at that time were confident in their own strength, but the Divine word of judgment was as good as fulfilled, so that :15 also uses the present tense in saying that "Moab is laid waste".

*Jeremiah 48:15 Moab is laid waste, and they are gone up into his cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, says the King, whose name is Yahweh of Armies-* These titles are in contrast to Chemosh, god of Moab, which means 'the powerful / subduing one'.

*Jeremiah 48:16 The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hurries fast-* This is a quotation from Dt. 32:35 about the judgments of Israel (Dt. 32:36). As suggested on :18, it is the Jews in Moab who are being addressed here.

*Jeremiah 48:17 All you who are around him, bemoan him; all you who know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, the beautiful rod!-* It would be Judah who particularly lamented the breaking of the strength of Moab, because she was one of the nations Judah trusted in against the Babylonians. We note how 'knowing his name' means to have trusted and understood Moab based upon his history and characteristics; and likewise to know Yahweh's Name is far more than simply knowing the word "Yahweh".

*Jeremiah 48:18 You daughter who dwells in Dibon, come down from your glory, and sit in thirst; for the destroyer of Moab has come up against you, he has destroyed your strongholds-* The daughter who dwelt in Egypt referred to the Jews who had fled there for salvation from the Babylonians; see on Jer. 46:19,24. Perhaps some had fled to Moab and been accepted there (from the time of Is. 16:4), and were confident that Babylonian judgment could never reach them. But the Babylonian destroyer of Moab would also come to them there. See on :20,22,23.

*Jeremiah 48:19 Inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and watch: ask him who flees, and her who escapes; say, What has been done?-* This town was Moab's great pride; Mesha records on the "Moabite stone" that he "built (i.e. restored) the city".

*Jeremiah 48:20 Moab is disappointed; for it is broken down: wail and cry; tell it by the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste-* "Disappointed" is a concept more relevant to the Jews being disappointed in their trust in Moab, just as those who lived in Egypt had been of their trust upon Egypt (Jer. 46:24). The Jews who had fled to Moab would likewise be disappointed (see on :18).

*Jeremiah 48:21 Judgement has come on the plain country, on Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath-* These last two were priestly cities (Josh. 21:36,37). Israel had allowed these priestly cities to be lost to Moab, and thereby had decreased the accessibility of salvation intended for them. We can do the same in essence.

*Jeremiah 48:22 Dibon, Nebo, Beth Diblathaim-* "House of two figs". The Hebrew name may have been carried over by the Moabites from its original Israelite name; or perhaps the Jews living there gave it this name. See on :18.

*Jeremiah 48:23 Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, Beth Meon-* The Moabites called the latter town Beth Baal Meon (Josh. 13:17), and it is noted like that on the Moabite stone. The absence of "Baal" could suggest that this was a town taken over by Jews who had emigrated there; see on :18.

*Jeremiah 48:24 Kerioth, Bozrah, and on all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near-* Kerioth could be another name for Ar (Num. 21:28; Am. 2:2). Bozrah is likely the Bezer of Dt. 4:43; Josh. 20:8; 21:36.

*Jeremiah 48:25 The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, says Yahweh-* This was the judgment to happen to Israel (Lam. 2:3; Am. 3:14). Again we see a similarity in the judgments, because it was the same Divine hand trying to also elicit repentance in Moab as well as Israel.

*Jeremiah 48:26 Make him drunken; for he magnified himself against Yahweh: and Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision-* See on :42. This may be an invitation to Jeremiah to again take a cup of wine to Moab (Jer. 25:15). Moab need not have drunk this cup of judgment, had they submitted to Babylon and repented before Yahweh. As Moab derided Israel, so they would be (:27). Again we see the eternal truth- that how we treat God's people is the basis for our eternal blessing or condemnation.

*Jeremiah 48:27 For wasn't Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves? For as often as you speak of him, you shake your head-* Israel were indeed as caught thieves (Jer. 2:26), who were to be despised. The Lord's Bible mind would have found some sort of encouragement from those who mocked Him. For the Lord was so clearly bearing the judgment of Israel's sins: "All who pass along the way clap their hands at you: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem" (Lam. 2:15). And note too Jer. 48:27 (LXX 31:27): "Is Israel a laughing stock? Was she caught between thieves that you wag your head?". This was exactly the Lord's position, between thieves, and mocked- but by Israel. These prophecies imply it was the Gentiles who would mock Israel; thus by treating the Lord as they did, they declared themselves to be no longer God's people but Gentiles.

*Jeremiah 48:28 You inhabitants of Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock; and be like the dove that makes her nest over the mouth of the abyss-* They were intended to hide themselves in the rocks in repentance and be ashamed of their idols, just as Judah were to (Jer. 48:11,13,28 cp. Is. 2:19-21). Israel were to be the light to the Gentile world around them, the righteous servant who showed light to the Gentiles; their repentance and restoration was to signal

that of the surrounding nations (see on :11). But they sadly failed.

*Jeremiah 48:29 We have heard of the pride of Moab. He is very proud; his loftiness, and his pride, and his arrogance, and the highness of his heart-* This is the ultimate reason for all condemnation. The pride of Moab is lamented also in Is. 25:11; Zeph. 2:8-10. This seems to be an expansion upon the prophecy of Is. 16:6.

*Jeremiah 48:30 I know his wrath, says Yahweh, that it is nothing; his boastings have worked nothing-* All external bravado and appearance is seen through by God; and we should also not find it attractive. Judah had found the bravado of Moab so attractive.

*Jeremiah 48:31 Therefore will I wail for Moab; yes, I will cry out for all Moab: for the men of Kir Heres shall they mourn-* Isaiah's love for the Gentiles whom he condemned (see on Is. 16:7) inspired Jeremiah to adopt the same attitude (Jer. 48:20,31-34); he too howled for those whose howling in condemnation he prophesied (Jer. 48:31 s.w.). As Moab cried out like a three year old heifer (Jer. 48:34), so did Isaiah for them (Is. 15:5). All this was done by Isaiah and Jeremiah, knowing that Moab hated Israel (Is. 25:10) and were evidently worthy of God's condemnation. But all the same they loved them, in the spirit of Noah witnessing to the mocking world around him. Our knowledge of this world's future means that as we walk the streets and mix with men and women, our heart should cry out for them, no matter how they behave towards us, and there should be a deep seated desire for at least some of them to come to repentance and thereby avoid the judgments to come. Particularly is this true, surely, of the people and land of Israel. It ought to be impossible for us to walk its streets or meet its people without at least desiring to give them a leaflet or say at least something to try to help them see what lies ahead.

*Jeremiah 48:32 With more than the weeping of Jazer will I weep for you, vine of Sibmah: your branches passed over the sea, they reached even to the sea of Jazer: on your summer fruits and on your vintage the destroyer is fallen-* The "I" who is lamenting is God through Jeremiah. It is hard to lament the fall of the arrogant and abusive; but all the same, we see here the lament for the loss of every human being by God and His prophet.

*Jeremiah 48:33 Gladness and joy is taken away from the fruitful field and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to cease from the wine presses: none shall tread with shouting; the shouting shall be no shouting-* The Hebrew noun is used for both the joyous shout of the grape-treaders and for a battle-cry. The removal of the blessing of joy and wine recalls the covenant blessings being withdrawn from Israel for breaking the covenant; and again we suspect that it is the Jews living in Moab who are particularly in view (see on :18).

*Jeremiah 48:34 From the cry of Heshbon even to Elealeh, even to Jahaz have they uttered their voice, from Zoar even to Horonaim, to Eglath Shelishiyah: for the waters of Nimrim also shall become desolate-* This is a condensed form of Is. 15:4-6. Isaiah's prophecies about Moab hadn't come true at his time, but now they had the possibility of coming true in Jeremiah's time. The final fulfilment of every prophetic word will be in the last days.

*Jeremiah 48:35 Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, says Yahweh, him who offers in the high place, and him who burns incense to his gods-* The implication could be that it was particularly the idolaters who were to be destroyed. The prophets condemn Israel for having adopted the gods of the surrounding nations, so perhaps these idol worshippers are specifically the Jews who had gone to live there; see on :18.

*Jeremiah 48:36 Therefore my heart sounds for Moab like pipes, and my heart sounds like pipes for the men of Kir Heres: therefore the abundance that he has gotten is perished-* This appears to be the interjection of Jeremiah for Moab. He really believed that what he was saying was going to happen to them, and his heart bled for them. See on 31.

*Jeremiah 48:37 For every head is bald, and every beard clipped: on all the hands are cuttings, and on the waist sackcloth-* This is a repeat of Is. 15:2. Such signs of mourning were forbidden to Israelites (Lev. 19:27; 21:5). But it seems that those mourning in Moab were Israelites who had taken refuge there, as they thought, from God's judgments through the Babylonians (see on :18). So the idea may be that they had become so identified with Moab

that they acted as they did, and thus broke their covenant with Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 48:38 On all the housetops of Moab and in its streets there is lamentation every where; for I have broken Moab like a vessel in which none delights, says Yahweh-* Housetops and streets were where idols were worshipped; earlier Jeremiah has lamented that Jerusalem's streets and roofs were full of such idolatry. Moab was no better, and would suffer the same judgment. Moab was now going to be a vessel in which nobody delighted- including the Jews who had fled there for refuge.

*Jeremiah 48:39 How it is broken down! How they wail! How Moab has turned the back with shame! So shall Moab become a derision and a terror to all who are around him-* The same kind of language is used about the condemnation of Moab as is used for that of Judah. The idea is that they were intended to repent together, so that the revived kingdom of God in Israel would be populated by the repentant, surrounding nations too.

*Jeremiah 48:40 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread out his wings against Moab-* Just as Babylon came as an eagle against Judah, so it would against Moab (Jer. 4:13; Dt. 28:49). There was to be no avoiding Divine judgment. The wings of the cherubim were there for Israel's protection; but they had spurned them, and instead run to Moab for help (see on :18).

*Jeremiah 48:41 Kerioth is taken, and the strongholds are seized, and the heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs-* Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Moab along with Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

*Jeremiah 48:42 Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he has magnified himself against Yahweh-* It is the Name of Yahweh which is to be magnified because of His special love for Israel (s.w. 2 Sam. 7:26), and therefore magnifying themselves against God's people was magnifying themselves against Yahweh (Zeph. 2:10). Any magnification of self against God's people is therefore a revolt against Yahweh and all that is implicit in His Name. We can do this, by magnifying our own desires and needs above those of His collective people.

*Jeremiah 48:43 Fear, the pit and the snare are upon you, inhabitant of Moab, says Yahweh-* Their relationship with Babylon would be a "snare" in that they united with them and were then destroyed by them.

*Jeremiah 48:44 He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he who gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring on him, even on Moab, the year of their visitation, says Yahweh-* Jer. 48:44; 49:5 describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people (as Job 3:25; Prov. 1:27), and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from "the noise of the fear". "The fear" is almost a way of saying 'the judgment of God' (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God's gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say 'it means nothing to me'. They shrug when I nervously mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I'm not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they're indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality.

*Jeremiah 48:45 Those who fled stand without strength under the shadow of Heshbon; for a fire is gone forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and has devoured the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones-* This quotes from the prophecies against Moab in Num. 21:28; 24:17. The final fulfilment of all the prophetic word will be at the last day, when the Lord Jesus as the "star out of Jacob" will destroy the latter day equivalent of Moab, and any Jews who have taken refuge with her.

*Jeremiah 48:46 Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh is undone; for your sons are taken away captive, and your daughters into captivity-* This is based on Num. 21:29. And yet Balaam's prophecies against Moab all have a latter day application. See on :47.

*Jeremiah 48:47 Yet will I revive the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, says Yahweh. Thus far is the judgement of Moab-* They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day.

## Jeremiah Chapter 49

*Jeremiah 49:1 Of the children of Ammon. Thus says Yahweh: Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? why then does Malcam possess Gad, and his people dwell in its cities?*- I suggested on the previous two chapters that these judgments have in view the fact that some Jews had fled to Egypt (see on Jer. 46:19) and Moab (see on Jer. 48:11) to try to avoid Divine judgment. But those judgments would come. And some had also fled to Ammon. We know this because Ishmael was living there with a community of Jews at the time of the Babylonian invasion of Judah (Jer. 40:14; 41:10). This was why the people of the ten tribes ["Gad"; or LXX "Gilead"] were dwelling in the cities of Ammon. By doing so, effectively those Jews and Israelites were cutting themselves off from the covenant. They were losing their possession, as if they had "no heir".

*Jeremiah 49:2 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will cause an alarm of war to be heard against Rabbah of the children of Ammon; and it shall become a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel possess those who possessed him, says Yahweh-* Historically there was no fulfilment of this; Rabbah wasn't burnt and then possessed by Israel. As noted at the end of Jer. 48, the prophecies here will come to their final fulfilment in the last days. They could have come true in Jeremiah's time; the potential scenario was that Israel and Judah both repented, the nations around them were judged and also repented, and together Abraham's fragmented family would be reunited in the revived Kingdom of God in Israel. This didn't then happen; but the prophetic thought and intention has been rescheduled and reapplied to the last days.

*Jeremiah 49:3 Wail, Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste; cry, you daughters of Rabbah, clothe yourself in sackcloth: lament, and run back and forth among the fences-* This lamenting could be a call to repentance- which was not responded to.

*For Malcam shall go into captivity, his priests and his princes together-* This is the same language as used about the Moabites in Jer. 48:7. It was understood that a god of a people or town always fought for its people, and if overcome, then it as it were goes into captivity (Is. 46:1; Am. 1:15). This was the difference with Israel's God Yahweh, the God who threatened to destroy His own city and temple because of His sensitivity to His peoples' sins; the God who brought their enemies upon them.

*Jeremiah 49:4 Why do you glory in the valleys, your flowing valley, backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures, saying, who shall come to me?*- All trust in human strength, wealth especially, is abhorrent to God. Treasures or wealth can in no way buy off Divine judgment. However the reference to a "backsliding daughter" is more relevant to the daughter of Zion who was then living in Ammonite territory (see on :1). It is a term used about her and not the Ammonites in Jer. 31:22.

*Jeremiah 49:5 Behold, I will bring a fear on you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, from all who are around you; and you shall be driven out every man right forth, and there shall be none to gather together the fugitive-* Jer. 48:44; 49:5 describe condemnation as fear being brought upon people (as Job 3:25; Prov. 1:27), and Is. 24:18 and other passages speak of the condemned fleeing from "the noise of the fear". "The fear" is almost a way of saying 'the judgment of God' (Lam. 3:47). The torment of the rejected will be their fear (1 Jn. 4:18). Psychologically, we need to get in touch with our own fears now, face our fears of condemnation eye to eye, and work through them- in repenting and coming to believe firmly in God's gracious acceptance, living in the spirit of the true love which casts out fear. I know men and women who knew God and walked with the Lord, but now say 'it means nothing to me'. They shrug when I nervously mention to them the reality of judgment to come- and I'm not very bold at bringing the conversations around to that issue, because it is just so fearsome and of such magnitude. They tell me that they're indifferent. But somewhere deep within them, no matter what good actors they are before the stage of our human eyes, there has to be a deep and awful fear. And it is that fear which will be revealed and which will grip them in that final day. Perhaps the greatest mental torment of the rejected will be realizing how they could have been in the Kingdom of God; they will then perceive how great was the potential which they had had in the brief years of their mortality.

*Jeremiah 49:6 But afterwards I will revive the fortunes of the children of Ammon, says Yahweh-* They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to

restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day.

*Jeremiah 49:7 Of Edom. Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished?-* All human wisdom is despised by God when it is used to justify unGodly behaviour. That was how He viewed the renowned wisdom of Edom, and it is how He must feel today.

*Jeremiah 49:8 Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau on him, the time that I shall visit him-* The appeal to "turn back" may be a call to repentance; although of all the nations, Edom is the one of whom there is no hint of future restoration. "The calamity of Esau" was the thing he feared most, which was domination by Jacob. This was not fulfilled at Jeremiah's time; the prophetic potential was that a repentant Israel would have dominated the nations around them. But Israel didn't repent; and so the fulfilment has been rescheduled to the last days.

*Jeremiah 49:9 If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning grapes?-* As we judge, we will be judged; even Babylon will be judged as she judged others (Rev. 18:20 RV), and Edom's judgments in Jer. 49:9 are an exact reflection of how she judged Israel, leaving no remnant (Obad. 5). And therefore we should almost jump at the opportunity to judge- with grace.

*If thieves by night, wouldn't they steal until they had enough?-* God as it were understands that a hungry thief will steal food (as taught in Prov. 6:30); but Edom had done far more than that. We see here God's sensitivity, and how He judges behaviour on a sliding scale, taking account of circumstantial factors. We are too easy to excuse sin by pleading situational ethics; but God as the only true judge can make this judgment in a way that we cannot. The implication of the argument is that a certain degree of theft or grape picking would have been acceptable with God. He recognized that Esau / Edom had a legitimate issue with Jacob, even though of course he should ideally have simply forgiven him. But God perceived that they had gone far beyond that. This is not to say that some degree of vengeance and sin is somehow OK with God, but beyond that invisible line, it is not. But on the other hand, God is used to judging human sin, and He does so with understanding, as the only true judge, taking into account all background factors which led to the sinful behaviour.

*Jeremiah 49:10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbours; and he is no more-* We would all claim to believe that God sees and knows all things, and yet our behaviour and thinking at times implies we think there are "secret places" hidden from His view. Edom had the same mentality (Jer. 49:10). God had specifically warned them that their ways were not "hid" from His eyes (Jer. 16:17 s.w.). And yet Israel like Edom thought they could hide from Him (Jer. 23:24 s.w.).

*Jeremiah 49:11 Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in Me-* This is a clear invitation to Edom to repent. They are asked not to focus solely upon their losses and the need to provide for their families in distress, but to trust in Yahweh. So easily faith in Yahweh is eclipsed by our sense that *we* can be and must be the saviour of the moment.

*Jeremiah 49:12 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, they to whom it didn't pertain to drink of the cup shall certainly drink; and are you he who shall altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink-* Edom had the attitude that the cup of Divine judgment could not come to them. This is a theme of all these final prophecies upon the nations- they thought, as did the Jews amongst them, that they could somehow avoid judgment. There were people who were not the objects of judgment who would suffer collateral damage from the judgments, and thereby they too drunk of it. So Edom shouldn't think that she should escape because of her geography and nature of her location.

*Jeremiah 49:13 For I have sworn by Myself, says Yahweh, that Bozrah shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all its cities shall be perpetual wastes-* The strength of the language against Edom always seems somewhat harsher than the words against the other nations; here God swears by Himself, as He can find no

greater way to express the truth (Heb. 6:13). Perhaps this is because Edom, which is Esau, was Jacob's brother. What we do against our brother in the faith is so especially culpable before God. Edom or Esau was singled out for such special condemnation because he was Jacob's brother (Obad. 10). This was not the case for the Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Philistines etc. Jacob and Esau were admittedly somewhat separated, and Jacob hadn't been the best brother to Esau. But they were still brothers, and God expected much better of Esau / Edom than He did of the others. And here too we find a penetrating challenge. Our brethren whom we may view askance, from whom we may be separated by the way life has gone for us, are still our brothers. And we are judged very sensitively according to our attitudes toward them, especially in the time of their distress, however justified we may feel that distress to be.

*Jeremiah 49:14 I have heard news from Yahweh, and an ambassador is sent among the nations saying-* Jeremiah is telling Edom that he had heard inside news, as it were, from Yahweh. Surely the reason for telling Edom ahead of time is so that they might repent. The Hebrew for "ambassador" is also translated "messenger", which is also what the Hebrew for "angel" means. So perhaps an Angel is in view, sent amongst the nations to stir them up to a battle which would result in the destruction of Edom. It was as if Jeremiah was allowed a vision of the court of heaven, the heavenly throne room, where decisions were made and Angels sent out to operationalize them. Obadiah was given the same insight concerning Edom, as he reports in the same words in Obadiah 1.

*Gather yourselves together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle-* According to Obadiah, who repeats this prophecy with further interpretation, the judgment of Edom was to result in the restoration of Israel's Kingdom. This could have happened at various points in the history of Judah and Israel, but it didn't, because Israel didn't repent and the restoration was not conducted spiritually. The ultimate fulfilment of this prophecy, as of all prophecy, will be in the last days.

*Jeremiah 49:15 For, behold, I have made you small among the nations, and despised among men-* The past tense here must be compared with the present tense used elsewhere about Edom's pride at that time. It is therefore a prophetic perfect- God's word, both of judgment and salvation blessing, is so certain of fulfilment that it can be spoken as having already happened. This is why there are passages which speak of the believer's salvation as if it has already occurred, whereas at this point in human time we are still mortal. It was Israel / Jacob who were made small among the nations; Jacob was the "younger", s.w. 'smaller', son compared to Esau (Gen. 27:15,42). Esau / Edom was to receive the judgment of Jacob. This is a major theme of the Apocalypse, that Israel's enemies suffer as she suffers; the seals of judgment upon Israel are in essence repeated in the vials of judgment upon the surrounding nations.

*Jeremiah 49:16 As for your terror, the pride of your heart has deceived you-* It was their apparently awesome human strength which deceived Esau / Edom, according to the parallel in Obad. 3. And in Obad. 7 it is the other nations in the confederacy against Israel who deceive Edom. They praised Edom's strength, and Edom's heart was thereby lifted up in pride. The problem with human strength is that it deceives; we thereby play God and become proud.

*O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill-* Pride is consistently given as the reason for the judgment of nations. God is so sensitive to it, and so should we be. The allusion is to how the houses in Petra were carved out of caves in the rock. Edom is recorded as having expelled the Horites from the area where the Edomites settled, and 'Horite' is literally 'a cave dweller'. The consistent message of the prophets is that human strength will not save ultimately, and is in fact an abomination to the God who loves humble trust in Him above all things.

*Though you should make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh-* Jer. 49:22 says that an eagle greater than them shall take them away from their mountain fortress.

*Jeremiah 49:17 Edom shall become an astonishment: each one who passes by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all its plagues-* This is the language of judgment upon Jerusalem; it would come also upon Edom. Esau would not be able to consider himself superior to Jacob; he would have the same judgment. But the full extent of the destruction of Edomite territory didn't then happen; see on :18,21.

*Jeremiah 49:18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein-* This has never quite come true for the land of Edom; the

implication is that the whole area would be punished in some way which made the whole area uninhabitable, as happened to Sodom. But this has been rescheduled to the last days. See on :17,21; Jer. 50:12.

*Jeremiah 49:19 Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who will stand before Me?*- This verse is repeated word for word in Jer. 50:44; and :20 is likewise about Babylon in Jer. 50:45. There is a theme that all the nations around Judah were to be given the same appeal for repentance. It was God's intention that they too repented, along with Israel and Judah, and formed part of a restored kingdom of God in the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The chosen shepherd appointed over Edom or Babylon will then ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd. But in the immediate application, it could have been Cyrus the Persian or Darius the Mede, who were the shepherds to be appointed over Edom and Babylon (Is. 44:28).

*Jeremiah 49:20 Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has taken against Edom; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely they shall drag them away, the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them-* See on :19. But Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed, using the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them". It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Edom could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." is surely an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness.

*Jeremiah 49:21 The earth trembles at the noise of their fall; there is a cry, the noise which is heard in the Red Sea-* The idea is that the entire area of Edom suffers an earthquake, reminiscent of the earthquake and topographical changes which seem to have occurred at the exodus. The Red Sea was the limit of their territory- 1 Kings 9:26 speaks of "Elath, on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom". But this didn't happen as planned at the time; see on :18.

*Jeremiah 49:22 Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread out his wings against Bozrah: and the heart of the mighty men of Edom at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs-* As noted on :16, the Edomites thought they were inaccessible as an eagle to Divine judgment; but a greater eagle would come upon them. Again the metaphor has hope of a new birth out of this calamity. The Divine hope was that Edom along with Moab (Jer. 48:41) and Israel would repent and form a reborn people in the restored Kingdom of God in Israel.

*Jeremiah 49:23 Of Damascus. Hamath is confounded, and Arpad; for they have heard evil news, they are melted away: there is sorrow on the sea; it can't be quiet-* This partly repeats the prophecy against Damascus of Is. 17:1-11; but Is. 17:7 is insistent that as a result of this, some in Damascus would repent. These prophecies of doom are not just droning on negatively; the hope is that they would respond to the news being given them ahead of time regarding their fall. The language of the restless sea alludes to Is. 57:19,20. They need not have been like that; peace with God was possible through their repentance.

*Jeremiah 49:24 Damascus has grown feeble, she turns herself to flee, and trembling has seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in travail-* This was presumably because of the threat of Babylon, although there is little historical evidence about this; I suggest on :25 that this was part of a prophetic scenario which didn't then come about. The reason for her judgment was because of what she had done to God's people (Am. 1:3); she had judged them too harshly, with iron threshing instruments, overstepping the Divine command to judge His people. And that was to be the problem with Babylon herself, and the reason for her condemnation.

*Jeremiah 49:25 How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy!-* This has to be a reference to Zion, the joy of the whole earth (Ps. 48:2). Although Zion was far from being that at the time (Lam. 2:15), God saw (as we should) to the realities of the future Kingdom of God as if they were present realities. The prophetic scenario was that Damascus would fall, but Zion would be again exalted and indeed become the joy of the whole earth, no longer

forsaken as she currently was. But the lack of repentance by both Israel and Damascus meant that this didn't work out at the time; perhaps that is why as noted on :24 the Babylonian desolation of Damascus didn't happen at that time as it could. All these things will come to their final truth, in essence, in the last days.

*Jeremiah 49:26 Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh of Armies-* This is the language of Zion's judgment. What they had done or wanted to do to God's people would be done to them. Again we see that even in Old Testament times, attitude to God's people is the basis for judgment. And that is an abiding principle for us today.

*Jeremiah 49:27 I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben Hadad-* This is alluded to in Am. 1:4,14. But the context of those prophecies is that it will happen in the day when Yahweh roars from out of Zion (Am. 1:2), in "the day of the whirlwind" (Am. 1:14). I suggested on :24,25 that these judgments on Damascus didn't come true as they could have done at the time, but will do so in the last days. And that seems to be the point of Amos repeating these words.

*Jeremiah 49:28 Of Kedar, and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck. Thus says Yahweh: Arise, go up to Kedar, and destroy the children of the east-* Babylon is portrayed as obedient to a Divine command to do so, acting as Yahweh's servant. Babylon's judgment was because they overstepped what they were commanded to do. Kedar and Hazor refer to the Bedouin Arabs (:29). Hazor may not refer to the city of that name but may be a take on *hazer*, an unwalled village of the type the Bedouins lived in (:31).

*Jeremiah 49:29 Their tents and their flocks shall they take; they shall carry away for themselves their curtains, and all their vessels, and their camels; and they shall cry to them, Terror on every side!*- This "terror on every side" quotes the judgment upon Judah in Jer. 6:25. Even the wandering Bedouin Arabs (see on :28) were to experience the judgments which came upon Judah. But this was so that they might be able to identify with God's people through this experience, and come to accept Israel's God. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

*Jeremiah 49:30 Flee, wander far off, dwell in the depths, you inhabitants of Hazor, says Yahweh; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has taken counsel against you, and has conceived a purpose against you-* Hazor may not refer to the city of that name but may be a take on *hazer*, an unwalled village of the type the Bedouins lived in (:31). Taking counsel and conceiving a purpose are exactly the words used of what Yahweh does (Jer. 29:11; 49:20; 50:45). But here, Nebuchadnezzar does so. Clearly God placed in his heart to fulfill His will. This is how God can work; placing desires and ideas in the human mind. This work upon the human spirit is achieved by God's Spirit; and this is how His Holy Spirit can work in our lives if we are open to it. Babylon was not condemned because they conceived these purposes; but because they overstepped the commissions given, leading them into the sin which called forth such condemnation.

*Jeremiah 49:31 Arise, go up to a nation that is at ease, that dwells without care, says Yahweh; that have neither gates nor bars, that dwell alone-* Just as Babylon "conceived a purpose" against those who live without bars and gates (:30), so the latter day invader led by Gog will "conceive a purpose" (s.w. Ez. 38:10) to attack an Israel dwelling without gates and bars (Ez. 38:11). The Babylonian attack upon the Bedouin Arabs therefore serves as a prototype of the latter day attack upon Israel. The description of these people as 'dwelling alone' is the very phrase used of Israel (Num. 23:9); this highlights the connection.

*Jeremiah 49:32 Their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their livestock a spoil: and I will scatter to all winds those who have the corners of their beards cut off; and I will bring their calamity on them from every side, says Yahweh-* Whether Nebuchadnezzar did this is not strongly attested to historically. But as noted on :2,24, we are seeing here a potential scenario of what could have come about, but which was rescheduled to fulfilment in the last days.

*Jeremiah 49:33 Hazor shall be a dwelling place of jackals, a desolation forever: no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein-* Just as was predicted of Edom (Jer. 49:18) and of the cities of Judah (Jer. 10:22). Divine judgment has the same hallmark wherever it is executed.

*Jeremiah 49:34 The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying-* The book of Jeremiah is not chronological but thematic. The theme here is of the nations around Judah being judged for what they had done to Judah. The fact Elam is mentioned as being judged at the beginning of Zedekiah's reign could imply that they had played some part in the early Babylonian attack upon Judah which resulted in the dethronement and captivity of Jehoiachin, whom Zedekiah replaced. Elam is not Persia proper; they were confederate with the Assyrians in attacking Judah earlier (Is. 22:6).

*Jeremiah 49:35 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might-* According to some of the cuneiform tablets acquired in 1878 by the British Museum, "At the very time when Nebuchadnezzar was taking an oath of allegiance from Zedekiah, he was also engaged in hostilities against Elam". So the breaking of Elam's power was to be by Babylon. The breaking of Elam's bow is because they had used their bow and quiver against Judah (Is. 22:6). Consistently, attitude toward God's people is the basis for judgment; and that is the lesson for us. The day of judgment will not be a theological examination, but rather a consideration of how we dealt with the hungry, thirsty and naked.

*Jeremiah 49:36 On Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of the sky, and will scatter them towards all those winds; and there shall be no nation where the outcasts of Elam shall not come-* These four winds appear to refer to Angelic powers (Zech. 6:5; Ps. 104:4). And yet the reference is to Babylonian forces. Babylon was a manifestation of the four cherubim figures seen in Ez. 1; they were controlled by God, doing His will.

*Jeremiah 49:37 I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before those who seek their life; and I will bring evil on them, even My fierce anger, says Yahweh; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them-* As noted on :36, the Babylonians were sent by God. They were His sword, sent by Him. The simple takeaway from all this is that there is no radical evil in the cosmos; all is under God's control and supervision.

*Jeremiah 49:38 and I will set My throne in Elam, and will destroy from there king and princes, says Yahweh-* This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time; but it was the potential. Their king and princes would be destroyed because Yahweh was to become their accepted king and they would thereby become part of His Kingdom. And it will come true at the last day; see on :39.

*Jeremiah 49:39 But it shall happen in the latter days, that I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says Yahweh-* They too were intended to participate in the peace to come upon the entire *eretz* promised to Abraham. It was God's intention to restore not just Israel, but all the peoples within the land, many of whom were in fact relatives of Abraham. The final fulfilment of these prophecies will be in the last day. Although we perhaps see an incipient fulfilment in that there were Elamites who converted to the God of Israel in Acts 2:9.

## Jeremiah Chapter 50

*Jeremiah 50:1 The word that Yahweh spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet-* To speak of Babylon in the hostile way the prophets do, especially as here signing oneself as the human author, was a brave and unpopular thing (Is. 13,14,21,46; Jer. 50,51; often in Zechariah). We know from Ez. 8, Jer. 44 and Zech. 5 that many Jews had accepted the idols of their Babylonian conquerors, rather like Ahaz did after his defeat by Assyria (2 Kings 16:10). The spirit of ridiculing the idolatry of Babylon whilst living in it, waiting the call to leave, is so relevant to modern Christians working, living and waiting in latter day Babylon. Jer. 25:13 had stated: "I will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations". These are clearly the words written in the prophecies against Babylon and the other nations here at the end of Jeremiah. The book of Jeremiah isn't arranged chronologically; Jer. 25:13 sounds as if "this book" of Jeremiah had been finished at this point.

*Jeremiah 50:2 Declare among the nations and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and don't conceal: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed; her images are disappointed, her idols are dismayed-* This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. Just before the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, the Jews within the city were making those very same idols, and would be disappointed in them just as Babylon was to be in the end (Jer. 10:14 s.w.). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8). It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

The news of Babylon's fall was to be published. Jeremiah had been the object of special care from Nebuchadnezzar, and so these prophecies against Babylon would appear to be biting the hand which fed him. Perhaps this was why Jeremiah chose not to go to Babylon, but to remain with the poor remnant of Jews in Judah. He knew that Babylon was to fall and he was to proclaim that, but it would be easier to achieve his prophetic mission if he published that message from somewhere outside of Babylon. We too are in a similar apparently difficult position in proclaiming the fall of this world, upon which in a secular sense we depend.

*Jeremiah 50:3 For out of the north there comes up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate, and none shall dwell therein: they are fled, they are gone, both man and animal-* Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God' judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason.

Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (e.g. Jer. 50:3,13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation.

*Jeremiah 50:4 In those days, and in that time, says Yahweh, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek Yahweh their God-* This is critical for us to understand the prophecies about Babylon. The intended prophetic scenario was that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the repentance of both the ten tribes and Judah; they would come "together", on the basis of the common experience of weeping repentance, and return to Zion. It is the common experience of God's grace and recognition of our sins which is the basis for unity in practice amongst God's people, rather than any dry theological agreement. The weeping of Ezra and Nehemiah was the basis for their desire to return to Zion (Ezra 10:1; Neh. 1:4). But the 'restoration' of the Jews was generally not upon that basis. Many chose to remain in captivity, and those who did return were motivated by a desire for personal benefit in the land grants they expected to receive in the land. And the restoration prophets are clear that many of them were not at all spiritually motivated. So the intended prophetic scenario didn't come about, and this in turn affected the outcome of the prophecies of the fall of Babylon.

*Jeremiah 50:5 They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces turned towards it saying, Come, and join yourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten-* The potential new covenant of Jer.

31:31 is spoken about in Jer. 50, where we read that Babylon would fall as God's revenge for what they did to God's people, and then Judah in their exile would return to Zion whilst inviting others to come and join themselves to that same new covenant. Indeed at the time of Babylon's fall, Judah were to heed God's call to "Remove out of the midst of Babylon", who had taken them captives (Jer. 50:8,33). Babylon did fall; and yet Judah did not return. Indeed, Daniel the Jew became a senior ruler in the administration that followed Babylon's fall (Dan. 5:31). They themselves refused the new covenant, and didn't invite Babylon and the surrounding peoples to join it. They would "ask the way to Zion" although their faces were already set to go there (AV); they would accept the call of Jer. 6:16 to ask or inquire for the Godly ways (s.w.), asking for their own intention to be confirmed; for their faces were already "turned towards it". And they would have been answered. But there is no evidence that they did ask for this.

*Jeremiah 50:6 My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray; they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill-* God in His zeal to think positively about His people lays the blame upon their bad shepherds. But we have often noted throughout Jeremiah that the people and the leadership are usually addressed together; the people were punished for their own sins, and their shepherds were only teaching what they perceived the people themselves wanted to hear. But God is as it were gushing in His desire to be positive about His people; and that is how He feels toward us too. And we should reflect that positivity.

*They have forgotten their resting place-* Zion, their resting place, had been forgotten by them in exile, despite their cultural loyalty to it. This is proof enough that Christian culture of itself is not enough; in reality they had forgotten Zion, despite singing songs such as Ps. 137:5 which avow their eternal remembrance of Zion.

*Jeremiah 50:7 All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, We are not guilty, because they have sinned against Yahweh-* The devourers of Israel considered themselves "not guilty" because Judah had sinned against their God. But the clear statement in Jer. 2:3 is that "All who devour him shall be held guilty". Punishing a sinner doesn't mean that those who do the punishing are thereby justified; we can be used by God, but that is no guarantee of righteousness or acceptability. This needs to be remembered by those who consider they can punish sinners within the church; they may well be held equally guilty for the lack of love they showed.

*The habitation of righteousness, even Yahweh, the hope of their fathers-* Jerusalem would be known as the habitation of the righteous one when Messiah came. But they refused that potential. Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations. This raises the question as to whether God would then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission. Indeed God wanted Babylon to accept Him; that was His desire. It was their refusal to do so, and their abuse of God's people beyond what they were commanded, which was the basis for their condemnation.

*Jeremiah 50:8 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans-* The offer of rest was rejected by the exiles then; but is taken up now by all who accept Christ, realizing that they are in the same state as the exiles in Babylon. "Come out from among them and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17) is picking up the language of Is. 48:20; 52:11; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7 concerning the return of the exiles from Babylon. The edict of Cyrus for the Jews to return to the land is in a sense pointing forward to God's command to us to leave the spirit of Babylon, the Gentile world, and go up to do His work. The returned exiles are us. Those who left Babylon did so of their own freewill (Ezra 7:13), and yet providential events stirred up their spirits to do this (Ezra 1:5); and the way was prepared in miraculous way. And so it is for us, in our exodus from this world and from the flesh.

God will confirm us in coming out from the world. He told His people to flee from Babylon, to come out of her and return to His land and Kingdom (Is. 48:20; 52:7; Jer. 50:8; Zech. 2:7). Babylon offered them a secure life, wealth, a society which accepted them (Esther 8:17; 10:3), houses which they had built for themselves (Jer. 29:5). And they were asked to leave all this, and travel the uncertain wilderness road to the ruins of Israel. They are cited in the NT as types of us in our exit from this world (2 Cor. 6:17; Rev. 18:4). Those who decided to obey God's command and leave Babylon were confirmed in this by God: He raised up their spirit to want to return and re-build Jerusalem, and He touched the heart of Cyrus to make decrees which greatly helped them to do this (Ezra 1:2-5). And so the same Lord God of Israel is waiting to confirm us in our every act of separation from the kingdoms of this world, great or small; and He waits not only to receive us, but to be a Father unto us, and to make us His sons and daughters (2 Cor. 6:18).

*And be as the male goats before the flocks-* The idea was that Judah's repentance would have lead the Gentile flocks

of nations to follow them to Zion in repentance. But this didn't happen, because the Jews weren't truly repentant, and the flocks didn't want to follow. Yet in essence it will come true in the last days.

*Jeremiah 50:9 For behold, I will stir up and cause to come up against Babylon a company of great nations from the north country; and they shall set themselves in array against her; from there she shall be taken-* Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability.

*Their arrows shall be as of an expert mighty man; none shall return in vain-* Every arrow would be guided by God to its mark.

*Jeremiah 50:10 Chaldea shall be a prey: all who prey on her shall be satisfied, says Yahweh-* Hab. 2:8 says that Chaldea would be a prey because of their violence against God's land and city. They had been commanded to take the land and city of God; but it seems their violence and bloodlust overstepped the bounds set by God. So it was not that God punished Babylon for being His servant. They were punished because they overstepped the boundary between legitimate punishment and abuse.

*Jeremiah 50:11 Because you are glad, because you rejoice, O you who plunder My inheritance, because you are wanton as a heifer that treads out the grain, and neigh as strong horses-* As explained on :10, it was the wanton, joyful plundering of Zion which was the basis of their condemnation. It was as if they were unmuzzled beasts not merely treading out the grain [performing the required judgments] but also eating the grain for themselves.

*Jeremiah 50:12 your mother shall be utterly disappointed; she who bore you shall be confounded: behold, she shall be the least of the nations, a wilderness, a dry land, and a desert-* The judgment was to be upon all Babylonia, not just the city of Babylon, who is here described as the mother of Babylon. All attempts to apply this verse solely to the city of Babylon are therefore misplaced; it refers to all Babylonia. And the whole area didn't become a literal desert; the fertile crescent remained fertile. This recalls how the similar judgments upon the area of Edom likewise didn't come about at the time; see on Jer. 49:18. But this will happen in the last days.

*Jeremiah 50:13 Because of the wrath of Yahweh she shall not be inhabited, but she shall be wholly desolate: everyone who goes by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues-* As explained on :12, this was part of a wider prophetic scenario, whereby Babylonian would be made like this and a repentant Judah and Israel would return to their land and their God (see on :3,4). But that scenario didn't come completely true; although it will in the last days. The language of total desolation implies some radical intervention akin to what happened to Sodom; and that didn't happen.

*Jeremiah 50:14 Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend the bow; shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she has sinned against Yahweh-* I noted on :10,11 that the sin against Yahweh was in elevating herself to Divine status, and punishing Israel more than God intended. For Babylon had been God's servant, obeying His commands concerning Judah and the nations.

*Jeremiah 50:15 Shout against her all around: she has submitted herself; her bulwarks are fallen, her walls are thrown down; for it is the vengeance of Yahweh: take vengeance on her; as she has done, do to her-* The command to "shout" to cause the fall of the walls of Jericho was a reflection of the belief Israel were to have in the fact that God *had already* given them the city- for the Hebrew for "shout" usually refers to a shout of victory. The word is translated "... will I triumph" in Ps. 60:8; 108:9. The same idea of shouting in victory over a city which has been given to God's people recurs in Jer. 50:15- "Shout against her round about [cp. compassing the walls of Jericho]... her foundations *are* [present tense] fallen, her walls [cp. Jericho's] *are* thrown down". And this speaks of our latter day victory against Babylon- thus making the whole account of earnest relevance to us who live in the last days, and who will see Babylon fall by faith. Notice how literal Babylon fell by the water of the river being dried up, and the walls being opened- just the same sequence of events that occurred at Jericho.

*Jeremiah 50:16 Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him who handles the sickle in the time of harvest-* Aristotle claims that grain was grown within the walled city area of Babylon. But even the agricultural workers were to be cut off. This didn't really happen when the Medes conquered the city.

*For fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn each one to his people, and they shall flee each one to his own land-* The various captive peoples taken to Babylon would each return to their own land, and Judah were to do likewise. But this isn't how things quite turned out. This was the prophetic ideal scenario, but it didn't happen because many Jews preferred to remain in Babylon and they didn't repent. The impression given is that the attack upon Babylon would reduce the city to ruins immediately. But this didn't happen under the Medes; it was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystaspes. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

*Jeremiah 50:17 Israel is a hunted sheep; the lions have driven him away: first, the king of Assyria devoured him; and now at the last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones-* "At the last" suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's abuse of Israel was "the last" suffering they would endure. That was the potential scenario; for had Israel repented at Babylon's fall, then a Messianic Kingdom of God would have been reestablished in Israel. But this didn't happen, and so this was not "the last" suffering of Israel.

The 'scattering' or 'driving away' to the gods of many different peoples (s.w. Jer. 3:13) would result in them being appropriately scattered amongst those nations (s.w. Esther 3:8; Joel 3:2). Judgment was really a reflecting back to them of what they in essence had done.

*Jeremiah 50:18 Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria-* The Assyrians were overthrown by the Medes and the Chaldeans. The Medes would again be used against Babylon.

*Jeremiah 50:19 I will bring Israel again to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in Gilead-* As noted on :3,4, the prophetic potential was that the fall of Babylon would coincide with the return of Israel to their land. But these events didn't happen together, because Judah didn't repent, and most of the ten tribes and Judah preferred to stay in exile. Carmel, Bashan, Mount Ephraim, and Gilead, were in the territory of the ten tribes, and they showed no interest in repenting or returning to the land.

*Jeremiah 50:20 In those days and in that time, says Yahweh, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant-* This would be because they had accepted the new covenant (Jer. 31:34). But they didn't; and so the prophetic scenario was precluded from coming true at the time as was potentially possible. That will be true for Israel in the last days, and for those who accept the new covenant today. The wonderful certainty of salvation and freedom from condemnation is brought out by the wonderful figure of the courtroom. God is the prosecutor- yet He is the one who shall search for Israel's sin, and admit that it cannot be found (Jer. 50:20). God is both judge, advocate for the defence, and prosecutor- and this is God is for us, the guilty! Rom. 8:33,34 develops the figure at length. The person bringing the complaint of sin against us is God alone- for there is no personal devil to do so. And the judge who can alone condemn us is the Lord Jesus alone. And yet we find the one 'brings the charge' instead being the very one who justifies us, or as the Greek means, renders us guiltless. The one who brings the charge becomes this strange judge who is so eager to declare us guiltless. And the judge who can alone condemn, or render guilty, is the very one who makes intercession to the judge for us- and moreover, the One who died for us, so passionate is His love. The logic is breathtaking, literally so.

*Jeremiah 50:21 Go up against the land of Merathaim, even against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod: kill and utterly destroy after them, says Yahweh, and do according to all that I have commanded you-* These names are chosen because of their meaning; "Merathaim" is the word used in :24 for how they rebelled or struggled against

Yahweh; "Pekod", where Nineveh was located and which had become a province of Babylon, is the same word used for "punish" in :18.

*Jeremiah 50:22 A sound of battle is in the land, and of great destruction-* Continually the stress is upon the destruction of "the land" of Babylon. To seek to apply these prophecies just to the city of Babylon is incorrect. The scenario of all Babylonia being destroyed didn't quite come true at the time as envisaged; the exiles didn't repent, and so the scenario didn't at that time come about.

*Jeremiah 50:23 How is the hammer of the whole earth cut apart and broken! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!-* Jeremiah had used the word for "hammer" earlier in describing the power of God's word (Jer. 23:29). Babylon had been a hammer on God's behalf, in fulfilling His word. Now a repentant Israel were to become that hammer, breaking all in pieces (Jer. 51:20-23). But this didn't happen, because Israel were not repentant and were therefore unwilling to be used by God for this. They could have been the little stone of Dan. 2:44 which returned from Babylon and destroyed the kingdoms upon the *eretz* in order to prepare the way for Yahweh's eternal kingdom. But they would not. And so these things are to come true in the last days, when a repentant and therefore willing Israel will become Yahweh's weapons to establish His Kingdom and do all the necessary 'breaking' (Jer. 51:20).

*Jeremiah 50:24 I have laid a snare for you, and you are also caught, Babylon, and you weren't aware: you are found, and also caught, because you have struggled against Yahweh-* The immediate application was in the Medes attacking Babylon unawares, by drying up the water of the protective river system around the city. Babylon had been given commands relating to Judah and the surrounding nations; but they had gone beyond fulfilling them, and had therefore striven against Yahweh, effectively declaring themselves to be Yahweh, and their kingdom as His Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 50:25 Yahweh has opened His armoury and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans-* The Medes and their confederate peoples had been prepared by Yahweh for the work in hand; they had as it were been stored up in His armoury for this moment.

*Jeremiah 50:26 Come against her from the utmost border; open her storehouses; cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly; let nothing of her be left-* The impression is given that the famed storehouses of Babylon were to be opened at the same time as she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystaspes. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

*Jeremiah 50:27 Kill all her bulls; let them go down to the slaughter: woe to them! For their day has come, the time of their visitation-* It has been observed that the slaughterhouses were below the river, and when the river was dried up, the soldiers of the Medes approached into the city through those slaughterhouses.

*Jeremiah 50:28 The voice of those who flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of Yahweh our God, the vengeance of His temple-* As noted on :3,4, we are reading here of a potential prophetic scenario which didn't actually come about at the time. The command to flee and escape from Babylon was largely ignored. The idea was that around the time when Babylon fell, the repentant Jewish and Israelite exiles would return to Zion. There, they would declare with joy that Babylon had fallen. But this isn't what happened. They didn't repent and most didn't return to the land. The prophecy is therefore to be reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

*Jeremiah 50:29 Call together the archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow; encamp against her all*

*around; let none of it escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she has done, do to her-* As noted on :26, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her. This projected scenario didn't come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment.

*For she has been proud against Yahweh, against the Holy One of Israel-* I have repeatedly made the point that Babylon is presented as being Yahweh's servant, doing what He commanded against both Israel and the nations, with Him putting the ideas into the king of Babylon's mind. God surely would not then turn around and condemn Babylon for their obedience. I suggest that Babylon is condemned because they overstepped the bounds of their commission, they were proud, and established themselves as Yahweh with their kingdom as His kingdom.

*Jeremiah 50:30 Therefore her young men will fall in her streets, and all her men of war will be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh-* This is what was done to Jerusalem, as Jeremiah frequently expresses in his Lamentations.

*Jeremiah 50:31 Behold, I am against you, you proud one, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies; for your day has come, the time that I will visit you-* Again, it was the pride of Babylon which led to her judgment; she had been Yahweh's servant, doing His will upon Judah and her neighbours. But she went too far and became exalted with pride, just as Is. 14 and other prophecies against Babylon make clear. The judgments against Babylon are perhaps the parade example of how seriously God views pride.

*Jeremiah 50:32 The proud one shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all who are around him-* Again, as noted on :31, it was pride which was the reason for Babylon's judgment and not the fact she had invaded Judah; for that had been at Yahweh's bidding and initiative. The destruction of all the cities of Babylonia with fire didn't happen; indeed, the Medes didn't destroy Babylon itself with fire; see on :26. This was the potential prophetic scenario which didn't come about, because Judah didn't repent (see on :3,4).

*Jeremiah 50:33 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The children of Israel and the children of Judah are oppressed together; and all who took them captive hold them fast; they refuse to let them go-* Because the Jews oppressed Gentiles (Jer. 7:6 s.w.), therefore they were to be oppressed by them (Dt. 28:29,33 s.w.). They were acting as "the oppressor" to God's people too (Jer. 21:12 s.w.), and so they too were oppressed by the Babylonians. How they treated their brethren was directly related to how they would be treated in their judgment, and this principle applies for all time. Their judgments were appropriate to their sins, as were Babylon's. But again we have here an example of why I say that we are reading about a potential prophetic scenario. There is no evidence that Israel and Judah actually strongly wanted to be allowed to return to their land at the end of 70 years; Judah responded poorly to the decree of Cyrus to return, and most of the ten tribes remained willfully in exile. But the prophetic potential was that Israel and Judah "together" would repent and return together. But they chose not to. Had they done so, and earnestly wanted to return to restore Zion, then Babylon would have been guilty of acting as Pharaoh, refusing to let God's people go; and would have been punished appropriately.

*Jeremiah 50:34 Their Redeemer is strong-* At that time, God was willing to be strong to show Himself Judah's redeemer- but they chose to remain in Babylon under the Medo-Persian administration. So they did not ask the way to Zion and seek a new covenant with Yahweh; and thus the promises of a new covenant, strong redemption in Yahweh, a Messiah figure arising, were all delayed and re-interpreted in their fulfilment. See on :5.

*Yahweh of Armies is His name: He will thoroughly plead their cause-* "Plead their cause" is legal language. As explained on Jer. 25:31, it was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah whom He condemned, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31); and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

*That He may give rest to the earth, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon-* The fall of Babylon was intended to lead to "rest" to the *eretz* promised to Abraham, in the form of the restored Kingdom of God in Israel. But this didn't in fact happen at that time. The prophetic picture here is only to come true in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

*Jeremiah 50:35 A sword is on the Chaldeans, says Yahweh, and on the inhabitants of Babylon, on her princes and on her wise men-* The idea of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon.

*Jeremiah 50:36 A sword is on the boasters, and they shall become fools; a sword is on her mighty men, and they shall be dismayed-* As noted on :31 and often, Babylon was judged above all for her pride and exaltation of human strength and wisdom. Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets ["boasters"] (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Her sin was that she thought of herself in her own right as the kingdom of God, instead of humbling herself to become part of His Kingdom.

*Jeremiah 50:37 A sword is on their horses, and on their chariots, and on all the mixed people who are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is on her treasures, and they shall be robbed-* The idea of a sword hanging over Babylon is an image used elsewhere about Jerusalem, and the idea is that there was therefore an appeal for repentance. This is what God wanted to see from Babylon. It was trust in horses, chariots and wealth which was so abhorrent to God; this was the basis for the pride which brought about her judgment; see on :31.

*Jeremiah 50:38 A drought is on her waters, and they shall be dried up; for it is a land of engraved images, and they are mad over idols-* This was partly fulfilled by the Medes diverting the course of the Euphrates in order to take Babylon by surprise; although Layard uncovered inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. The judgments described here are upon her "land"; perhaps all the water sources are in view and not just the river around the city of Babylon. And this didn't happen to all of Babylonia. What was in view was a destruction of all Babylonia after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (:40). And that didn't happen; the prophetic scenario didn't come true at the time, and Rev. 18 alludes to these prophecies to demonstrate that they will come true in essence only in the very last days.

*Jeremiah 50:39 Therefore the wild animals of the desert with the wolves shall dwell there, and the ostriches shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall it be lived in from generation to generation-* As noted on :26, much of Babylon did escape when the Medes attacked and conquered her, and the city continued being inhabited for some time. This projected scenario didn't come about at the time, and yet will do in essence in its latter day fulfilment, as Rev. 18 explains.

*Jeremiah 50:40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, so shall no man dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein-* Such dramatic destruction of Babylon didn't happen at the hands of the Medes (see on :26). And we must bear in mind the many hints that the projected judgments were not just upon the city of Babylon but upon the land of Babylon i.e. Babylonia. The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time, but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days.

*Jeremiah 50:41 Behold, a people comes from the north; and a great nation and many kings shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth-* Just as Babylon had been the nation from the north who would bring God's judgments, so now she is to be judged from the north. She was to be made to realize how she had made others feel. It is not simply so that 'what goes around comes around'; there is a purpose in these judgments repeating themselves. It was so that those who had witnessed and participated in the judgment of Israel might come to see how it felt, and thereby repent. We too are at times made to feel the effect of our actions upon others- for the same reason. For "stirred up", see on :9.

*Jeremiah 50:42 They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea; and they ride on horses, each one set in array as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Babylon-* This quotes the condemnation of Judah in Jer. 6:23 and applies it to Babylon. What Babylon had done to Judah was to be done to her. There is a continuity in God's judgments, they all bear the same Divine hallmark. And the same desire to

elicit repentance. The scenario here again doesn't quite fit the picture of what happened to historical Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

*Jeremiah 50:43 The king of Babylon has heard the news of them, and his hands wax feeble: anguish has taken hold of him, pains as of a woman in labour-* This is not quite the same as the impression given by surface level Bible teachers that the king of Babylon was rejoicing in his city, confident in his own strength, when the Medes diverted the course of the Euphrates and took the city by surprise. The record in Daniel 5 is correct, but that record doesn't contradict the information given here- that the king was already deeply concerned at the advance of the Medes. Here we read that he was feeble at the news of the enemy advance. Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender.

*Jeremiah 50:44 Behold, the enemy shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who can stand before Me?-* This verse is repeated word for word in Jer. 49:19 about Edom; and :45 is likewise about Edom in Jer. 49:20. There is a theme that all the nations around Judah were to be given the same appeal for repentance. It was God's intention that they too repented, along with Israel and Judah, and formed part of a restored kingdom of God in the whole *eretz* promised to Abraham. This didn't happen at the time, and so it is reapplied and rescheduled to the last days. The chosen shepherd appointed over Edom or Babylon will then ultimately be the Lord Jesus, the good shepherd. But in the immediate application, it could have been Cyrus the Persian or Darius the Mede, who were the shepherds to be appointed over Edom and Babylon (Is. 44:28).

*Jeremiah 50:45 Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has taken against Babylon; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely they shall drag them away, even the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them-* See on :44. But Jer. 18:8 clearly states that this purpose could have been changed, using the same word to say that God will "repent of the evil that I purposed to do to them". It was God's intention that all the nations around Israel would repent along with His people, and turn to Him. Even Babylon could have repented at this point. "Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh..." is surely an appeal for repentance. That God should make so much effort with hardened worldlings... indicates His depth of concern for human salvation. And it should encourage us in our witness.

*Jeremiah 50:46 At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth trembles, and the cry is heard among the nations-* The fall of Babylon was intended to cause panic amongst the nations of the *eretz* promised to Abraham, and her "cry" is frightening for those nations. Rev. 18 interprets this for us, as meaning that the nations of the *eretz* were all confederate with and supportive of Babylon, and would take her fall as a body blow to themselves. But that was not the scene when the Medes took Babylon. Again, the prophetic scenario here described didn't fully happen when the Medes captured Babylon, or as Layard claims, Babylon opened her gates in surrender to the Medes. We are looking at a potential scenario which was precluded by the lack of repentance and desire for restoration in Israel and Judah (see on :3,4). But this is not to say that the prophecy was proven false; it is reinterpreted and rescheduled for the last days in Rev. 18.

## Jeremiah Chapter 51

*Jeremiah 51:1 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up a destroying wind against Babylon and against those who dwell in Lebkamai-* see on Ex. 12:23. For "raise", see on :11. God makes His Angels spirits or winds (Ps. 104:4), so the invaders were under the direct control of God. "Lebkamai" is "Chaldea", written in the cypher called athbash (see on :41 and Jer. 25:26); just as "Sheshach" in :41 is equivalent to Babel. But why this apparent attempt to hide the reference to Babylon, when "Babylon" has just been mentioned? One suggestion is that the prophecy was given earlier, and Jeremiah sought to hide the direct reference to Babylon; but later inspired editing added the name "Babylon". Or we could stick with the AV: "Them that dwell in the midst of her". But that would raise the question as to why "Lebkamai" is "Chaldea", written in athbash.

*Jeremiah 51:2 I will send to Babylon strangers who shall winnow her; and they shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her around-* The image of winnowing suggests that there would be some good grain which would fall to the ground. Again we see that the intention of God was that some in Babylon would repent as a result of the judgments. God never lashes out in anger as it were, with the frustration of a more powerful being. Always there is the hope and intention of reformation and salvation for some through His necessary judgments.

*Jeremiah 51:3 Against him who bends let the archer bend his bow, and against him who lifts himself up in his coat of mail: don't spare her young men; utterly destroy all her army-* This wasn't really the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on :4.

*Jeremiah 51:4 They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and thrust through in her streets-* This isn't the scenario which happened when the Medes took Babylon; see on :3. As mentioned often in commentary on Jer. 50, the judgments here are not only upon the city of Babylon, but upon the entire "land of the Chaldeans", Babylonia. The scale of sudden destruction implied didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon. The prophetic scenario projected in these prophecies didn't fully happen, although it will do so ultimately in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear. This was because Judah and Israel didn't repent and earnestly seek to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4,26. And this was intended to be connected with the realization of these prophecies upon Babylon.

*Jeremiah 51:5 For neither Israel nor Judah is forsaken, of his God, of Yahweh of Armies; though their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel-* The prophetic intention was that Israel and Judah would be reunited through the joint experience of repentance and receipt of forgiveness by grace, and would together return from exile to restore Zion; see on Jer. 50:3,4. But they preferred to remain in exile, and therefore failed to make use of the amazing grace offered to them- that despite being so guilty, God had not forsaken them. The word specifically means to be forsaken in the sense of divorced in a marriage; although God had said that effectively they had ended the marriage by breaking the marital covenant, and they were therefore divorced, yet His love was such that they were not forsaken by Him, despite the "guilt" of their unfaithfulness. But this great grace was spurned by them.

*Jeremiah 51:6 Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and save every man his life; don't be cut off in her iniquity: for it is the time of Yahweh's vengeance; He will render to her a recompense-* Jer. 51:6,45 make it clear that every single Jew ("every man his soul") was ordered by God to leave Babylon- and Jer. 51:60 clarifies that all these words were written down and that Seraiah read them to the Jews of Babylon. They were *all* supposed to "let Jerusalem come into your mind" (Jer. 50:50)- but in the end, only a minority like Nehemiah did so. Judah's disobedience was chronic and specific. They rejected all the wonderful things which God had worked out for them in potential. It was such a tragedy, as tragic as when we individually are our community as a whole repeat it in our contexts today. For the call to leave Babylon is quoted in the New Testament as an appeal for us to respond to in our day. Those who remained in Babylon rather than returning to Judah would be "cut off in her iniquity". But actually this threatened judgment didn't happen in that way. Most of the Jews did stay there, and simply assimilated into the world around them. And the scenario envisaged here therefore didn't happen; when Cyrus took Babylon, he didn't kill the Jews but

rather encouraged them to return to their homeland, as he did the other exiled peoples he found there.

*Jeremiah 51:7 Babylon has been a golden cup in Yahweh's hand, who made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad-* "Mad" is the Hebrew *halal* which is usually used about praise (s.w. Jer. 20:13) which the nations shall finally give (Jer. 31:7 s.w.), although it can carry the sense of 'raving'. If madness was solely in view, another word would have been used. Perhaps the word choice was again to hint that they could come to repentance and praise of Yahweh as a result of the judgments- if they responded rightly.

*Jeremiah 51:8 Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed-* Babylon was not "suddenly" destroyed by the Medes; full weight must be given to the inscriptions uncovered by Layard which say that in fact Babylon opened her own gates to the Medes in surrender. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, which was still standing; and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystaspes. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

*Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed-* This opens another window into what God potentially planned at this time. Balm in Jer. 46:11 refers to repentance. Surely this passage speaks of Judah appealing to Babylon to repent, and then coming out of her, returning to Judah, and leaving her to perish in her iniquity if she didn't repent. God's intention here was not carried out by Judah. They made no appeal for Babylon to repent. Only a few of them returned to Judah, most preferring the Babylon life. But *had they done what God suggested*, then the whole prophecies about Babylon's destruction would have become conditional prophecies, exactly after the pattern of Jonah's pronouncement of destruction upon Nineveh, which actually never came to pass because they did repent. So although the doom of Babylon was often prophesied, even this could have been avoided if Babylon had hearkened to the witness which Israel were supposed to make to her of their wonderful God. Remember how Jeremiah told the exiles to pray for the good of Babylon and to seek its' peace with God (Jer. 29:7).

*Jeremiah 51:9 We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go each one into his own country-* Consider the nuance of John Bright's strict translation of Jer. 51:8,9: "Wail over (Babylon)! Get ointment for her hurt- perhaps it's curable. Though we treated her, Babylon mends not". The implication is clearly that God intended to use Judah to bring about Babylon's repentance, and only because this failed did He finally "Give her up" to destruction (Jer. 51:9). If this scenario had happened, then the prophecies of judgment against Babylon would have been more clearly revealed for what I believe they were- conditional, upon her repentance.

*For her judgement reaches to the sky, and is lifted up even to heaven-* The idea of knowing God's judgments is frightening. Sin is its own judgment. Sins rise up to Heaven (2 Chron. 28:9)- and the judgment for them is spoken of as rising up to Heaven (same Hebrew words, Jer. 51:9). Sin and judgment are paralleled. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. The outcome of the judgment needn't be something mysterious to us; it isn't necessarily the great unknown to the thoughtful, self-reflective believer who *knows and loves and studies* God's judgments with the verve of David in Ps. 119

*Jeremiah 51:10 Yahweh has brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of Yahweh our God-* The exiles were warned time and again to flee from Babylon back to the land, so that they wouldn't share in the destruction of the city. There's no record they did so; and yet by grace, God seems to have preserved them from perishing or even suffering as a result of the Persian takeover of Babylon. Indeed, they prospered under the Persians, and as soon as Cyrus took Babylon he encouraged the Jews to return to rebuild Zion. The voice of the faithful remnant pleaded with the other exiles after the fall of Babylon: "Babylon is fallen... forsake her [as they had been told to do *before* Babylon fell, Jer. 51:6], and let us go and return to our own country... and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord" (Jer. 51:8,10). God's patient grace to the Jews in Babylon was amazing. The hope was that they would recognize that they had had righteousness imputed to them, and this was 'their' righteousness which had been "brought forth"; and their response was to declare in Zion God's work, i.e. to begin rebuilding and restoring the temple and God's Kingdom there. But none of this was really fulfilled as was potentially possible.

*Jeremiah 51:11 Make sharp the arrows; hold firm the shields: Yahweh has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes; because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it: for it is the revenge of Yahweh, the revenge for His temple-* Just as God stirred or raised up Babylon to invade Judah (Jer. 6:22), sharpening her arrows (Ez. 21:21), so He would stir up, or psychologically provoke, other nations to come and judge her (Jer. 50:9,41; 51:1,11 s.w.). This is greatly emphasized. The activity of God directly upon human hearts is a great theme of the Biblical revelation, and is to encourage us that He is eager to transform hearts, and to place desires within us beyond our own unaided psychological ability. But the Medes didn't destroy Babylon; as explained on :3,8, there was no destruction of the city, and so much was left that it revived several times and asserted independence. He did not take full vengeance for what Babylon did in His temple because His own people were not eager to rebuild it and were not recognizant of their role in its destruction.

*Jeremiah 51:12 Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set the watchmen, prepare the ambushes-* The watchmen here are not the Babylonian defenders, but the attackers. The concept is used as in Jer. 4:16 "Watchers [i.e. besiegers] come from a far country".

*For Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon-* There is a vision described in 1 Kings 22:22 of the Angels presenting their various plans of how to slay Ahab. God says to the one whose plan He accepts "Thou shalt persuade him (Ahab), and prevail also: go forth, and do so". Thus the Angel still has to "prevail" or 'struggle' to operationalize a command from God which they know is His will to perform; and we have to do likewise, not least in the preaching of the Gospel, both obeying and prevailing. This makes more sense of Jer. 51:12, which says that "The Lord (of Hosts / Angels, :14) hath *both* devised and done that which He spake" about Babylon.

Israel were told to separate themselves from Babylon because God had purposed to destroy that nation; they were asked to believe that what God had planned, He would actually do (Jer. 51:12), and therefore they should treat Babylon accordingly in their attitudes. Appreciating that God is beyond time, not just an everlasting being but without time, helps us to understand a whole range of Biblical issues. Faith is about adopting God's time-less perspective. Israel were told to separate themselves from Babylon because God had purposed to destroy that nation; they were asked to believe that what God had planned, He would actually do, and therefore they should treat Babylon accordingly in their attitudes. Appreciating that God is beyond time, not just an everlasting being but without time, helps us to understand a whole range of Biblical issues.

*Jeremiah 51:13 You who dwell on many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness-* As explained on :8, the victory of the Medes against Babylon was not then the "end" of Babylon. The prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 imply a sudden fall of Babylon by supernatural means which would mean her immediate and permanent end. This didn't happen when the Medes entered Babylon. Again we see that the prophetic scenario didn't fully happen at that time; although Rev. 18 makes it clear that it will do so, in essence, in the last days.

*Jeremiah 51:14 Yahweh of Armies has sworn by Himself saying, Surely I will fill you with men, as a swarm of locusts; and they shall lift up a shout against you-* LXX "Sing songs of victory over you", an example of which we have in Is. 14, and one of which now follows in :15-19.

*Jeremiah 51:15 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens-* As noted on :15, we have in :15-:19 a victory song which would be sung over Babylon. But the song of victory would be a declaration of Yahweh's power in creation. Only His people could sing this. And there is no evidence that the Jews did rejoice when Babylon fell. Like Daniel, they continued to prosper under Cyrus as they had under the Babylonians. They were intended to rejoice that Yahweh's wisdom was exalted, rather than that of the Babylonians.

*Jeremiah 51:16 When He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures-* His power in the natural creation was reflected in how He brought a destroying wind against Babylon (:1); the vapours or waters which He makes to ascend from the ends of the earth were reflected in how He brought people

from the ends of the earth to destroy Babylon (:27,28). These words are a repeat of Jer. 10:13, where they are in the context of rebuking belief in idols. The context is the same here (:17); and yet in reality, the Jews continued to believe in idols. For Ezekiel had to rebuke the exiles in Babylon for their idolatry. It was only after a few generations that they quit idolatry.

*Jeremiah 51:17 Every man has become a brute, without knowledge. Every goldsmith is disappointed by his image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them-* This is the very language used about the disappointment of the Jews when they made these Babylonian idols on the eve of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem (Jer. 10:14). This is the ultimate end of all idolatry, of all life lived without total devotion to God- disappointment. Judah likewise would be disappointed in Egypt, the world (s.w. Jer. 46:24). Life is only in Yahweh; both eternal life, and meaningful life now. It was the idols who were primitive and without knowledge (Jer. 10:8); and those who make and worship idols become like unto them, also "primitive..." (Ps. 115:8). The desire to worship is built within the human condition. And we become like what we worship. It is therefore critically important to worship the right thing.

*Jeremiah 51:18 They are vanity, a work of delusion: in the time of their visitation they shall perish-* This quotes the words of Jer. 10:15, of how the Jews who made these Babylonian idols would be forced to this same realization.

*Jeremiah 51:19 The portion of Jacob is not like these-* Jacob inherits God, having Him as his portion; and God inherits Israel / Jacob. We see here the mutuality intended between God and Israel. This is yet another reflection of God's recognition that finally, Jacob fulfilled his promise to make Yahweh his God (Gen. 28:20). The lessons of Jacob's name change were finally learnt.

*For He is the former of all things; and Jacob is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name-* It was the prophetic hope that Judah and the ten tribe kingdom would unite as one in the restored kingdom of God in Israel. "Israel" is therefore described here as a singular tribe.

*Jeremiah 51:20 You are my battle axe and weapons of war: and with you will I break in pieces the nations; and with you will I destroy kingdoms-* The potential was that God would have used a revived Israel as an army to destroy Babylon (Ez. 37:10). The same message is given here. The strong emphasis here in :20-22 upon 'breaking in pieces' recalls the little stone of Dan. 2 cut out from the great mountain (Babylon) which was to destroy the kingdoms of men then dominating Israel and become a great kingdom of God on earth. This potential didn't happen; but it shall do finally in the last days.

*Jeremiah 51:21 And with you will I break in pieces the horse and his rider-* This is the language of the victory song (see on :14) against Pharaoh and the Egyptians.

*Jeremiah 51:22 And with you will I break in pieces the chariot and him who rides therein; and with you will I break in pieces man and woman; and with you will I break in pieces the old man and the youth; and with you will I break in pieces the young man and the virgin-* The Divine intention seems to have been that the exiles repented and themselves would seek to return to restore Zion (see on Jer. 50:3,4). Babylon would be given the opportunity to repent, and if they didn't, then the Medes would take their city, although there is not much hint in the prophecies of violent conflict between the Medes and the Babylonians. The actual destruction of the impenitent Babylonians would be done by God's use of Israel, to do to those Babylonians what they had done (according to Jeremiah's Lamentations) to the men, women, old people and children in the streets of Jerusalem. But the entire scenario simply didn't come about. For the prime mover in the whole sequence was the repentance of Israel, and this just didn't happen. But these prophecies will have their essential fulfilment in the last days.

*Jeremiah 51:23 And with you will I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; and with you will I break in pieces the farmer and his yoke; and with you will I break in pieces governors and deputies-* Babylon had been a hammer on God's behalf (Jer. 50:23), in fulfilling His word (Jer. 23:29). Now a repentant Israel were to become that hammer, breaking all in pieces (Jer. 51:20-23). But this didn't happen at the time, because Israel were not repentant and were therefore unwilling to be used by God for this. They could have been the little stone of Dan. 2:44 which returned

from Babylon and destroyed the kingdoms upon the *eretz* in order to prepare the way for Yahweh's eternal kingdom. But they would not. And so these things are to come true in the last days, when a repentant and therefore willing Israel will become Yahweh's weapons to establish His Kingdom and do all the necessary 'breaking' (Jer. 51:20).

*Jeremiah 51:24 I will render to Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, says Yahweh-* "In your sight" suggests that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

*Jeremiah 51:25 Behold, I am against you, destroying mountain, says Yahweh, which destroys all the land; and I will stretch out My hand on you and roll you down from the rocks-* Babylon is set up as a fake Christ and Kingdom of God. She had proselytes and prophets (Jer. 50:36,37); a mountain (Jer. 51:25); "The golden city" (Is. 14:4) with a thick, embellished wall (Jer. 51:58); springs and rivers within her (Jer. 51:36); "The praise of the whole earth" (Jer. 51:41). Babylon was the mountain out of whom the little stone of the repentant exiles could have returned to reestablish God's Kingdom in Israel (Dan. 2:44). But they did not repent nor wish to restore God's Kingdom, and they rejected the new covenant offered to them upon which that Kingdom could have been established. A mountain rolling down sounds like the stones and lava hurled from the crater of an exploding volcano; this would match the idea of Babylon being destroyed in a similarly dramatic way as Sodom (see on Jer. 50:40). But this didn't happen as projected; although it will in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear.

*And will make you a burnt mountain-* Heb. 'a burning mountain'. Babylon was not much burnt by the Medes when they took it. And so this idea of a burning mountain is applied in a latter day context in Rev. 8:8. It is emphasized that the latter day Babylon will indeed be burnt (Rev. 18:9,18). But this could potentially have happened in Jeremiah's time, had Israel repented (see on :22).

*Jeremiah 51:26 They shall not take of you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but you shall be desolate for ever, says Yahweh-* As explained on :25, this was to be because there would literally be no stone visible due to the effects of the volcano which was projected as happening. The lava flow would not leave a stone useful to any builder. But the volcano and Sodom-like destruction of Babylon and all Babylonia didn't happen (Jer. 50:40); it has been reapplied and deferred to the last days, and is alluded to in this context in Rev. 18.

*Jeremiah 51:27 Set up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz: appoint a marshal against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough canker worm-* LXX "like bristling locusts". "Prepare" is to sanctify. But we enquire whether these particular kingdoms were the ones who actually destroyed Babylon, and whether there was one specific "marshal" or LXX "commander" who coordinated her destruction. It's hard to prove this historically, because the destruction of historical Babylon was slow, as explained on :8. And there was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. The potential prophetic scenario projected here didn't happen, because the repentance of Israel which was to be associated with it didn't happen (see on Jer. 50:3,4). Whilst the essence of the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear through its allusions to Jer. 50 and Jer. 51, this is not to say that every detail will be.

*Jeremiah 51:28 Prepare against her the nations, the kings of the Medes, its governors, and all its deputies, and all the land of their dominion-* These nations were indeed "prepared" by God to fulfill the potential scenario here projected. But as explained on :22, the lack of Israel's repentance precluded the associated planned events from happening. So much Divine work goes to preparing potentials which we then waste.

*Jeremiah 51:29 The land trembles and is in pain; for the plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant-* Again we note that this is said not only of the city of Babylon but of all Babylonia. The entire region was to be destroyed by an earthquake [the land trembling], related to the volcano of :25; there was to be supernatural destruction after the pattern of Sodom's destruction (see on Jer. 50:39,40). The image of Sodom's destruction suggests direct, miraculous Divine intervention. This didn't happen at Jeremiah's time,

but Rev. 18 alludes to all this and makes it clear that such Divine intervention will occur against latter Babylon in the last days. The statement that "the plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand" suggest that God's spoken words of judgment have a gap between them and their fulfilment; and in that gap, human repentance and mediation can result in a changed outcome. His desire therefore was that Babylon repent. But they did not, and so His plans stood.

*Jeremiah 51:30 The mighty men of Babylon have declined to fight, they remain in their strongholds; their might has failed; they are become as women: her dwelling places are set on fire; her bars are broken-* Hence we should give due weight to the discovery by Layard of inscriptions which say that Babylon opened her own gates in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future.

*Jeremiah 51:31 One runner will run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every quarter-* The idea is that bearing the news from opposite quarters, they meet at the king's palace in the heart of the city.

*Jeremiah 51:32 And the passages are seized, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are frightened-* "Passages" can be "fords", and "reeds" can be "pools". This would then refer to the drying up of the river by the Medes in order to enter the city.

*Jeremiah 51:33 For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while, and the time of harvest shall come for her-* Babylon "is" as if she has already been harvested and is being threshed; and yet harvest time is yet to "come for her". Here we have a parade example of God speaking in the present tense of things yet future, so certain are they of fulfilment. And yet within the metaphor of winnowing and harvest there is still the hope that at least some grain shall fall to the ground; that there would at least be some repentance in Babylon. This is always the hope resident within all Divine judgments.

*Jeremiah 51:34 Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has, like a monster, swallowed me up, he has filled his maw with my delicacies; he has cast me out-* These were to be the words of the captive exiles of Zion (:35). In response to this, God would take vengeance for them against Babylon (:36). But we wonder whether the exiles were by this stage really angry with the Babylonians. Daniel and other Jews like him were now acceptable in Babylonian society, just as they were later at Esther's time. Ezekiel's dialogues with the exiles in Ez. 18 and elsewhere indicate they were more bitter with God than they were with the Babylonians, and were in fact serving their gods. And so therefore the full vengeance of God in response to these projected words didn't happen (:36); which is why the judgments upon Babylon didn't come true at that time.

*Jeremiah 51:35 The violence done to me and to my flesh be on Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and, my blood be on the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say-* See on :34. "Done to me" suggests that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem and its effects upon them and their children ("my flesh") who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

*Jeremiah 51:36 Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will plead your cause, and take vengeance for you; and I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain dry-* See on :34. As explained on Jer. 25:31, it was a complicated case, with counter appeals which resulted in everyone being condemned- and yet Judah then being finally justified, by grace. Yahweh had this legal case with Judah whom He condemned, and then with the peoples who supported Babylon against her (Jer. 25:31); and then He has this case against Babylon (Jer. 51:36) during which He is advocate for Judah, whose cause He legally pleads in the court case (Jer. 50:34) of which He is judge as well as advocate for the defence. Being both advocate and judge, we see the certainty of Judah's final justification- if they chose to accept His amazing grace in justifying them.

*Jeremiah 51:37 Babylon shall become heaps-* The impression is given that she was turned into heaps with nothing left. But this didn't happen when the Medes took the city. It was only some time later that Cyrus further demolished parts of Babylon's wall, and there was a rebellion of Babylon at the time of Darius Hystaspes. The deportation of some of the population happened even later in the time of Seleucus Nicanor. But the impression is given that all this would happen immediately at Babylon's fall. It didn't, because the preconditions related to Judah's repentance didn't come about. And so the prophecies were reapplied and rescheduled to the last days, and are alluded to throughout Rev. 18 with reference to the fall of latter day Babylon; which appears to not refer to the literal city of Babylon.

*A dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without inhabitant-* The language in Jer. 9:11 of Jerusalem's destruction into heaps haunted by jackals is applied to Babylon; and likewise the way Jerusalem was to become a hissing (Jer. 19:8) is also now to be true of Babylon. What latter day Babylon does to Jerusalem shall be done to her; and that is the theme of the book of Revelation, where the seals of judgment upon Israel become the vials of judgment upon the beast system.

*Jeremiah 51:38 They shall roar together like young lions; they shall growl as lions' cubs-* This suggests a violent resistance from the lions of Babylon. But full weight must be given to the inscriptions uncovered by Layard which say that in fact Babylon opened her own gates to the Medes in surrender. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; the Nabonidus Chronicle records that the people of Babylon welcomed Cyrus by spreading green twigs before him (James Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (3rd ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968, p. 306b). Both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. See on :4.

*Jeremiah 51:39 When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, says Yahweh-* Although generally these prophecies have only a very loose fit with the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, this is indeed the scene described in Daniel 5 when Babylon fell during a feast. We note that they themselves made a feast, probably at the festival of the god Bel, and made themselves drunk; but God made them drunk. This is His way with men, to work through their own natural desires and decisions.

*Jeremiah 51:40 I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with male goats-* Lambs, rams and goats may just be representative of all the classes of the people of Babylon. But there is no historical evidence that many people died when the Medes took the city, apart from Belshazzar. Such a fall of Babylon's entire society in a moment is to happen in the last days (Rev. 18).

*Jeremiah 51:41 How is Sheshach taken and the praise of the whole earth seized! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!-* "Sheshach" is a code name for Babylon. The Jewish kabbalists had a system called athbash, whereby the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet is read as the last one, the second letter as the second to last letter, etc. "Sheshach" is the spelling of "Babylon" according to this; and yet the word *sheshach* means "humiliation", which was to happen to Babylon (Is. 47:1). We wonder why Jeremiah at times uses this term whereas at other times he is clear that he refers to "Babylon". If he was scared of repercussions, then we wonder why at times he does refer to "Babylon". I suggest therefore that he is simply making the point that proud Babylon was to be humiliated. For the essence of all human sin is pride, and judgment is therefore about humiliating pride. And we are to humble ourselves now. However I suggested on :1 that part of this material may have been written earlier, when he was still nervous about mentioning Babylon by name; and this would account for the positive actions of Nebuchadnezzar toward him when Jerusalem fell.

We note that Babylon was setting itself up as an alternative Zion, "the praise of the whole earth" being the title of Zion. This was the kind of blasphemy which called forth these judgments, rather than simply the invasion of Judah- for Babylon had been commanded by God to do that.

*Jeremiah 51:42 The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of its waves-* As noted on Jer. 50:40, the destruction of Babylonian was envisaged as also including miraculous Divine destruction after the pattern of Sodom, which is now apparently beneath the Dead Sea. Hence the references to Babylon being destroyed by a volcano (:25) and earthquake (:29). But this didn't happen at the time, although it will in the last day fulfilment of these prophecies (Rev. 18). As explained on :22, the prophetic scenario didn't happen at the time because of Israel's

lack of repentance. See on :62,63.

*Jeremiah 51:43 Her cities are become a desolation, a dry land and a desert, a land in which no man dwells, neither does any son of man pass thereby-* There is little point in claiming this was fulfilled in that historical Babylon was not rebuilt; the reference is to the plural "cities" and land of Babylonia. The entire territory was to be made like this; see on :42. In any case, the taking of Babylon by the Medes didn't mean that people stopped living there; the city continued to prosper for long after that, several times asserting its independence. The fulfillment is to be in the last days, although the prophecy appears to be reapplied to a more symbolic "Babylon" in Rev. 18.

*Jeremiah 51:44 I will execute judgement on Bel in Babylon-* This didn't happen when Darius took Babylon. Soon after, Babylonia briefly recovered its independence under a native ruler, Nidinta-Bel, who took the name of Nebuchadnezzar III. A few years later, in 514 BC, Babylon again revolted and declared independence under the Armenian King Arakha; only on this occasion, after its capture by the Persians, were the walls partly destroyed. E-Saggila, the great temple of Bel, however, still continued to be kept in repair and to be a center of Babylonian patriotism. Among Babylonians, feelings were still strong that none had a right to rule over western Asia until he had been consecrated to the office by Bel and his priests. Accordingly, Cyrus henceforth assumed the imperial title of "King of Babylon", claiming to be the legitimate successor of the ancient Babylonian kings and the avenger of Bel and portrayed himself as the savior, chosen by Bel to restore order and justice. So again we see that although the essence of these prophecies will be totally fulfilled in the last days, there was often no short term fulfillment of them; and the longer term fulfillment will be of the essence of the prophecies and not all the detail.

*And I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up-* There was an element of this fulfilled in that Cyrus encouraged the exiled nations to return to their homelands, including the Jews. But there is also here the hint of a miracle; that the consumed Israel, eaten by the lion of Babylon, would somehow revive and resurrect, being brought forth out of the lion.

*And the nations shall not flow any more to him: yes, the wall of Babylon shall fall-* We have to remember that Jeremiah's prophecies about Babylon were given in the context of the prophecies about Judah's restoration. The fall of Babylon was clearly intended to be the signal that the Jews should leave and return: "Down comes Babylon's wall! Out from the midst of her, my people!" (Jer. 51:44,45). And Cyrus, the conqueror of Babylon, made the decree for the Jews to return to their land. And yet... most of them remained. As explained on :8, the wall of Babylon didn't fall when Darius took Babylon. It was slowly destroyed over a long period. Passages like Jeremiah 50 imply that when Babylon fell, Judah would return to their land and flourish into the Kingdom of God. But this didn't happen. Another scenario worked out- Darius took over the kingdom of Babylon (Dan. 5:31), and the image prophecy of Daniel 2 explained that there would now have to be a succession of empires before the Kingdom of God would come. I therefore see Daniel 2 as a new prophetic scenario which would have to come into operation if Judah didn't do as they were told in the prophetic word. Hence the vision has two ways of being read- the whole image could represent Babylon and its next rulers, which would be destroyed in toto and replaced by the restored Kingdom of God at the time it fell; or, it could be read as a long term prophecy of the ensuing centuries, if Judah didn't turn into the Kingdom of God as they could have done. And this is the outworking that became necessary.

*Jeremiah 51:45 My people, go away from the midst of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of Yahweh-* See on :6. The Jews didn't leave Babylon to restore Zion because they were impenitent and didn't wish to; and so the projected scenario didn't happen. They did not suffer when Babylon fell to Cyrus, indeed as soon as he entered the city he urged the exiles from the various nations to take their gods and religious equipment and return to their homelands.

*Jeremiah 51:46 Don't let your heart faint, neither fear for the news that shall be heard in the land; for news shall come one year, and after that in another year shall come news, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler-* "Ruler against ruler" is reapplied to the situation of the last days in Lk. 21:10. In that same context, the Lord Jesus alluded to "Don't let your heart faint" (Lk. 21:36) again in relation to things of the last days. Likewise "violence in the land" is applied to the last days in Lk. 21:23. The reference to the news coming one year and then again in the next year could mean that this fall of Babylon was to happen within two years of Jeremiah's prophecy being published. As noted on :24, the length of the exile period is thus shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10.

*Jeremiah 51:47 Therefore behold the days come, that I will execute judgement on the engraved images of Babylon; and her whole land shall be confounded; and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her-* The conquest of Babylon by the Medes was achieved with very little loss of life apart from that of king Belshazzar; see on :3. As explained on :44,52, her god Bel was not immediately "confounded" either, at least not in the eyes of men. Nor was the whole land of Babylonia exactly confounded with shock at Babylon's fall. And the implication of the prophecy is that all these things were to happen immediately, contiguous with Babylon's fall. So again we see that the projected prophetic scenario didn't come about at the time it potentially could have done, but will do so in the latter day fulfilment (Rev. 18).

*Jeremiah 51:48 Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come to her from the north, says Yahweh-* Here we have "heavens and earth" used as representative of God's people. For it was Zion and the "daughters of Judah" who were commanded to rejoice at Babylon's fall (Ps. 48:11). But there is no record of them obeying this command; for they were too caught up in Babylon by this stage. And so the prophecy will be fulfilled in a reapplied and rescheduled manner in the last days, when a slightly different group would rejoice over Babylon's fall: "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets, for God hath avenged you on her" (Rev. 18:20).

*Jeremiah 51:49 As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land-* Again, this didn't happen when the Medes took Babylon, and the prophecies of Jer. 50,51 imply that all these things will happen suddenly and simultaneously, not over an extended period. The conquest of Babylon by the Medes was achieved with very little loss of life apart from that of king Belshazzar; see on :3. Vengeance was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

*Jeremiah 51:50 You who have escaped the sword, go, don't stand still; remember Yahweh from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind-* See on :6. This is an appeal for the exiles to desire to return to rebuild Zion. The implication is again that it was the same generation who had escaped the Babylonian sword who were to now return. The appeal to remember Yahweh from afar alludes to the words of Moses and Solomon, envisioning a time when exiled Israel would repent "from afar". But they didn't. See on :24,35. Those verses also suggest that it was the same generation who could remember the devastation of Jerusalem who would now judge and destroy Babylon. The length of the exile period is again shown to be open ended; see on Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. As explained on :22, Israel were not used at this time to judge the Babylonians, because they did not repent.

*Jeremiah 51:51 We are confounded, because we have heard reproach; confusion has covered our faces: for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of Yahweh's house-* Shame / confusion covered the faces of God's people when the temple was desecrated, but this was because their faces had not been covered with shame at their sins. The same phrase is used for this in Jer. 3:25. It's shame for sin now, or shame at judgment day. This was the intended statement of repentance to be made by the Jews, and it was this repentance which would trigger the Babylon judgments outlined here (see on Jer. 50:3,4). See on :52.

*Jeremiah 51:52 Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will execute judgement on her engraved images; and through all her land the wounded shall groan-* "Therefore..." means that because of the statement of repentance made by the exiles in :51, God would judge Babylon's idols. Yet as demonstrated on :44,47, those idols were not immediately judged by the fall of Babylon to the Medes. The projected, potential judgment was precluded by Israel's lack of repentance, just as the detailed temple prophecies of Ez. 40-48 were likewise not fulfilled as they could have been at the time. If we enquire why, then, are all these potential details given... it is to teach us that likewise, finely detailed potential futures have been prepared for us in our lives. But unless we have the required humility and openness to God's ways, they will not come about.

*Jeremiah 51:53 Though Babylon should mount up to the sky, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me shall destroyers come to her, says Yahweh-* This repeats the language used of Edom, who thought they were so protected by their high position that no judgment could ever reach them (Jer. 49:16). The similarity is to show that it is pride which more than anything else was the reason for Babylon's judgment. The

language of Is. 14:13,14 is also being alluded to; Babylon mounted up to heaven itself in her arrogance, playing God, effectively deposing Yahweh.

*Jeremiah 51:54 The sound of a cry from Babylon, and of great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans!*- I explained on :3 how there was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon. Nor was the land of the Chaldeans, i.e. Babylonia, subject to the kind of "great destruction" envisaged here; see on :25. But the fall of Babylon with a great cry and supernatural Divine destruction will ultimately come about in the last days, as Rev. 18 makes clear, even though the definition of "Babylon" may be redefined. As I have repeatedly explained, the lack of repentance by Israel precluded these Babylon events occurring when they potentially could have done.

*Jeremiah 51:55 For Yahweh lays Babylon waste, and destroys out of her the great voice; and their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is uttered*- This suggests that the great voice of the king of Babylon will be replaced by the noise of waters which overcome her. Those raging waters could indeed represent the attacking nations; but as explained on :25, there has been projected the idea of Babylon being laid utterly waste as Sodom was, involving an earthquake and volcano, and then being plunged underwater as Sodom was in the Dead Sea. This potential scenario didn't happen, because it was precluded by Israel's impenitence.

*Jeremiah 51:56 For the destroyer has come on her, even on Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, their bows are broken in pieces; for Yahweh is a God of recompenses, He will surely requite*- This wasn't quite the scene when the Medes took Babylon. There was much support for Darius the Mede within Babylon; both the Babylonian Chronicles and the Cyrus Cylinder describe Babylon being taken "without battle". So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

*Jeremiah 51:57 I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her governors and her deputies, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake up, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies*- Although generally these prophecies have only a very loose fit with the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, this is indeed the scene described in Daniel 5 when Babylon fell during a feast. We note that they themselves made a feast, probably at the festival of the god Bel, and made themselves drunk; but God made them drunk. This is His way with men, to work through their own natural desires and decisions. We note that "perpetual sleep" from which they would not awake indicates that the punishment is eternal death- and death is therefore unconsciousness. Eternal conscious torment is not a Bible teaching.

*Jeremiah 51:58 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown, and her high gates shall be burned with fire*- As explained on :44, the walls were not destroyed by the Medes when they took Babylon, and they were only demolished bit by bit over subsequent history. The dramatic fall of her walls, surely alluding to the fall of the walls of Jericho, just didn't happen. Indeed inscriptions have been discovered detailing the repair of damaged gates in the wall. Nor were they then burnt with fire, despite the impression given in these prophecies that all these judgments happen more or less simultaneously and not over an extended period of decades and even centuries. These things are all reapplied and reframed in the latter day destruction of "Babylon" in Rev. 18.

*And the peoples shall labour for vanity, and the nations for the fire; and they shall be weary*- See on Hab. 2:13. GNB "The work of the nations is all for nothing; their efforts go up in flames. I, the LORD Almighty, have spoken". Yet Babylon continued long after the Medes took it, and several times reasserted its independence. It is only in the last days that Babylon along with all human works shall be burnt permanently with fire (Rev. 18:8). But we can pause to take comfort and challenge from this- that all human labour shall ultimately come to nothing before God's judgment. Only the things of His Kingdom shall eternally endure.

*Jeremiah 51:59 The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. Now Seraiah was chief quartermaster*- It seems from Jer. 51:59-64 that Zedekiah made a visit to Babylon, along with his entourage, presumably to make some peace with Nebuchadnezzar before the final invasion. And yet Jeremiah takes the opportunity to send a prophecy of the doom of Babylon along with Seraiah, one of Zedekiah's officers who accompanied him. Seraiah was brother to Baruch (Jer. 32:12), Jeremiah's scribe, and presumably therefore also loyal

to Jeremiah and willing to undertake this very brave witness. For this was scarcely politically expedient; indeed, the whole message of Babylon's impending destruction must have been extremely hard to distribute at that time, for a whole number of reasons, not least that the rest of the entourage desperately wanted to appease Babylon, whose puppet rulers they were. Jeremiah later had to do the same kind of thing when he and the refugee Jews arrived in Egypt. See on :1 and Jer. 43:12.

*Jeremiah 51:60 Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come on Babylon, even all these words that are written concerning Babylon-* See on :6,59. We wonder why Jeremiah writes in the book and not Baruch, who had always been his scribe. Perhaps it was because Baruch's brother Seraiah was to physically take it to Babylon (see on :59) and they felt it better to clarify that this was not just a family thing. Or perhaps Baruch had failed to take Jeremiah's warning not to seek great things for himself (Jer. 45:5) and was wary of getting into trouble with their Babylonian masters by condemning Babylon.

*Jeremiah 51:61 Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words-* As explained on :59, this was a hugely risky and unpopular thing to do. His fellow Jews would have been hugely angry with him for doing so- if indeed he did what Jeremiah asked. For it was a huge thing to do, which would have endangered his life. Perhaps he didn't actually do it- because Nebuchadnezzar is very solicitous of Jeremiah's welfare some time later when Jerusalem fell. That is hard to understand if he had heard Jeremiah's words about Babylon.

*Jeremiah 51:62 And say, Yahweh, You have spoken concerning this place to cut it off, that none shall dwell therein, neither man nor animal, but that it shall be desolate forever-* This was a way of saying "Amen" to Yahweh's words, giving a brief summary of them in his own name, addressed to Yahweh. The prophecy that Babylon would be cut off an uninhabited didn't come true when the Medes took Babylon. Babylon existed for a long time afterwards. And yet the tenor of Jer. 50,51 is that all these judgments were to happen simultaneously and not slowly over a period of years. This didn't happen; and the only way Babylon could not be inhabited by animals would be if it were judged as Sodom and placed underwater- as provisioned in :42. Again we conclude that these prophecies about Babylon were what was potentially planned, but it was precluded by Israel's lack of repentance, which was the required condition to as it were trigger the Babylon prophecies; see on :22. The ultimate fulfilment will be in the last days, seeing these prophecies are the basis of Rev. 18.

*Jeremiah 51:63 It shall be, when you have made an end of reading this book, that you shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates-* Jeremiah's ministry began with the statement that his prophetic words had the power to destroy. Those words are therefore here connected with their object, Babylon. As those words would plunge underwater, so would Babylon. As suggested on :42, Babylon would be judged as Sodom and placed underwater- the waters of the Euphrates would flood over the destroyed city. That didn't happen at the time, for the reasons discussed on :62.

*Jeremiah 51:64 And you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again because of the evil that I will bring on her; and they shall be weary-* See on :63. "Sink" is s.w. "quenched" (Num. 11:2); as discussed on :25,26,42, Babylon was to be destroyed by a volcano, reduced to burning lava, and then submerged beneath the Euphrates for ever, never to rise up out of those waters. That was the prophetic potential for that time; but it was precluded from happening like that because Israel's repentance was the required condition to as it were trigger the Babylon prophecies; see on :22. The ultimate fulfilment will be in the last days, seeing these prophecies are the basis of Rev. 18.

*Thus far are the words of Jeremiah-* This would suggest that Jer. 52 was added by inspiration by an editor, or it could be that Jer. 52 was also written by Jeremiah, as was the book of Lamentations, but was not bound up in the earlier volume or edition of his prophecies.

## Jeremiah Chapter 52

*Jeremiah 52:1 Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem-* Jeremiah's words finished in Jer. 51:64. This chapter agrees almost word for word with 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, although we note that the section about Gedaliah in 2 Kings 25:22-26 is omitted because the history of Gedaliah has been dealt with in more detail already in Jeremiah. It could be that the inspired editor of the book chose to as it were copy and paste the section from 2 Kings (with a few minor changes) as a helpful appendix to the book. Verses 28-30 give a different take however on their equivalent in 2 Kings 24:1-20.

*And his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah-* Zedekiah was thus brother of Jehoahaz but half-brother of Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:31, 36).

*Jeremiah 52:2 He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that Jehoiakim had done-* The implication is that he was intended to have learnt from the fate of Jehoiakim his half brother, but instead he acted just the same. God also brings people into our lives so that we might learn from their life path and destiny. We never specifically read of Zedekiah worshipping idols, and he hardly comes over as the worst of Judah's kings, but his "evil" was in the weakness of character which he displayed when faced with God's demand for him to submit to Nebuchadnezzar.

*Jeremiah 52:3 For through the anger of Yahweh it happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon-* Zedekiah's rebellion was purely of his own device. But he is described here as rebelling "through the anger of Yahweh"; God intended to pour out His wrath, and so His hand was in the rebellion of Zedekiah, using that man's freewill decisions although through Jeremiah pleading with him not to go that way. We marvel at the perfect balance and intimate involvement in the psychology and decision making of people.

*Jeremiah 52:4 It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about-* These forts had been portrayed and 'built' by Ezekiel when he drew them upon a tile in an acted parable (Ez. 4:1-3). Had the earlier exiles in Babylon repented, then this would not have happened. Likewise if Zedekiah had repented, it would not have happened. We see here how God doesn't just let things happen in a disinterested way, allowing natural forces to take their course. What happened was so avoidable; Zedekiah's weakness could have been cancelled out, as it were, by the repentance of the exiles with Ezekiel. And their refusal to repent could have been cancelled out by Zedekiah's repentance. Or if both of these elements failed, had the wealthy rulers of Jerusalem really let their slaves go free and not re-enslaved them, the siege could have been lifted. And there were other such factors and potential possibilities. Stubborn, proud refusal to bow our heads in repentance precludes so much from happening, and allows so much judgment to come which could have been averted.

*Jeremiah 52:5 So the city was besieged to the eleventh year of king Zedekiah-* Jer. 39:1,2 allows us to conclude that the city was besieged for exactly 18 months.

*Jeremiah 52:6 In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was severe in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land-* Jeremiah had earlier prophesied that many would die from famine and plague during the siege. It was by special grace that Jeremiah in prison was given bread right up to the day that Jerusalem fell.

*Jeremiah 52:7 Then a breach was made in the city-* The Babylonians made a breach in the wall to the north, from where the cherubim had left and would return. But Zedekiah tried to escape by digging a hole in the southern wall (Ez. 12:12). He did to the city what the Babylonians did. This "breach" is the same word used for the breaking up of things at the time of the flood (Gen. 6:11), a well established foretaste of the destruction of Jerusalem by the flood waters of the Babylonians, albeit with the promise of a new creation coming as a result of it.

*And all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night-* "Went out" is the language of Judas going out (Jn. 13:30), Cain "went out" (Gen. 4:16), as did Zedekiah in the judgment of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:4; 52:7). Esau went

out from the land of Canaan into Edom, slinking away from the face of his brother Jacob, sensing his righteousness and his own carnality (Gen. 36:2-8). Even in this life, those who leave the ecclesia 'go out' after the pattern of Judas, who also went out at night, condemning themselves in advance of the judgment by their attitude to the ecclesia (1 Jn. 2:19 cp. Acts 15:24). The unrighteous flee from God now, as they will then (Hos. 7:13). Zedekiah's experience of condemnation is presented as typical of every man condemned at the last day.

*By the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden; (now the Chaldeans were against the city all around)-* It seems Zedekiah had taken refuge in the temple. From there, he saw the princes of Babylon who had breached the northern wall and were now at the temple gate (Jer. 39:3). And so they fled by "the king's garden", which was his own private entrance to the temple, and then came to the double walls of the southern perimeter of the city. Zedekiah himself dug through those walls, the strongest point of his defence and human strength (Ez. 12:12). He was being taught that all human defence, and the physical temple, was not going to save him.

*And they went towards the Arabah-* The chalky depression in the midst of which the river Jordan ran.

*Jeremiah 52:8 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him-* The allusion is to how an Israel who broke covenant with their God would surely be overtaken by curses and judgment (Dt. 28:15). As his pursuers closed the distance between them and him, with him unable to gather more speed nor find a suitable place to run, now completely alone and without his bodyguards, he was a living exemplification of how Divine judgment will catch up with every man. He would then have dearly wished he had had the humility to listen to Jeremiah's pleas for repentance and submission. And he there was and is the exemplification of every man condemned before God.

*Jeremiah 52:9 Then they took the king and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgement on him-* Zedekiah fled, was overtaken, wept (Ez. 7:27), judgment was given upon him (Jer. 52:9), he was punished in the presence of the king (Jer. 52:10), cast into prison (Jer. 52:11 cp. Mt. 5:25). He had his judgment in this life; and perhaps he may yet therefore be saved in the last day, seeing he apparently repented (see on :11).

*Jeremiah 52:10 The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he killed also all the princes of Judah in Riblah-* We wonder why Zedekiah was spared but his sons were not. I will suggest on :11 that he later repented, even though he refused to repent and humble himself before God's word when he ought to have done. His sons presumably were foreknown that they would not repent, and so they were slain. Perhaps seeing their deaths made Zedekiah realize that they were dying because he had not repented when he ought to have done; for it was his lack of repentance earlier which, he was told, would bring about the death of women and children. We may just possibly have some window here onto the terrible problem of the death of children.

*Jeremiah 52:11 He put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon, and imprisoned him until the day of his death-* LXX "in the mill", as if he was in hard labour, now blinded, exactly like Samson (Jud. 16:21), and as the young men were made to (Lam. 5:13). And the similarities continued, in that it seems Zedekiah likewise did finally repent. Jer. 21:7; 27:13 had prophesied that Zedekiah would be slain by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar when Jerusalem fell. But Zedekiah wasn't slain by Nebuchadnezzar, but rather died in captivity. Perhaps he repented; or God chose to work out another path of judgment with Zedekiah which would achieve more glory for Him and His objectives than simply having him slain by the sword. The statement in Jer. 21:7 that Nebuchadnezzar would not show him "pity nor have mercy" and not spare him was therefore not fulfilled; because he was reflecting the God who had also said He would not spare or pity, but yet He did. I explained on Jer. 34:5 that Zedekiah died "in peace", peace with God, and the threatened judgments upon him weren't completely carried out- presumably because he did finally repent. If we are to finally repent, then let us repent now before suffering comes upon us to elicit that repentance.

*Jeremiah 52:12 Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, who stood before the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem-* 2 Kings 25:8 says on the seventh day of the month. It could be that he arrived on the seventh day, and burnt the houses and temple (:13) on the tenth day. I suggested on :1 that the Kings record has been as it were copied and pasted into this appendix to Jeremiah, so we could have here a simple error in copying.

*Jeremiah 52:13 and he burned the house of Yahweh, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burned he with fire-* Jeremiah elsewhere criticized the building of these great houses on the walls of Jerusalem- for they were built on the back of abusing the poor for material and labour. They were finally torn down by the Babylonians, but even before that, the owners themselves broke them down and the materials were used to shore up the breaches in the city walls (Jer. 33:4). Likewise there are foretastes of judgment ahead of time in the lives of all God's people.

*Jeremiah 52:14 All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around-* We noted in the prophecies of Jer. 50 and Jer. 51 a special emphasis upon the breaking down of the walls of Babylon because of what they had done to Jerusalem, i.e. breaking down her walls. But we also observed on Jer. 51:44 that when the Medes took Babylon, the walls weren't broken down, and in fact they were only broken down bit by bit over the course of many years. So the main fulfilment of this must yet be future. Vengeance or "recompense" was not fully taken by God upon Babylon for what they did to Israel because Israel had not repented, recognizing that actually those judgments had been rightfully deserved by their gross sins.

*Jeremiah 52:15 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the poorest of the people, and the residue of the people who were left in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the residue of the multitude-* Or as AVmg. "residue of the artificers" or workmen. I suggested elsewhere that these may have been those skilled in building the defences; or it could refer to those who were the makers of idols. See on Jer. 10:18.

*Jeremiah 52:16 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vineyard keepers and farmers-* This was probably the majority of the population. The Babylonians, unlike the Assyrians, didn't practice mass deportations. They removed the leadership of subjected peoples, and appointed locals as the leaders under their control. This is what they did to Judah, taking the royal family and priesthood into captivity, and establishing Gedaliah as puppet governor (Jer. 40: 7; 2 Kings 25:2) along with some local Jewish "elders" (Lam. 5:12), with Mizpeh rather than Jerusalem as the capital. Ezra 9:7 is clear that it was "our kings and our priests [who] have been delivered" into captivity. The Babylonians saw no economic purpose in bringing masses of unskilled peasant farmers into captivity in their cities. It's been estimated that at least 90% of Judah were peasant farmers; and these, the impoverished masses, were left in the land and not deported (Jer. 52:16; 2 Kings 25:12). See on Ez. 11:15. The Babylonian policy regarding deportation and management of conquered lands is described in N.P. Lemche, *Ancient Israel: A New History of Israelite Society* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) and D.L. Smith, *The Religion of the Landless: The Social Context of the Babylonian Exile* (Bloomington, IN: Meyer Stone, 1989). God did not therefore scatter all the people quite as He intended. There is archaeological evidence for continued agricultural activity in the land after the deportations. And Jer. 41:5 seems to speak of men coming to the Jerusalem temple from Shechem and Shiloh, in the ten tribe area, in order to offer grain offerings at the site of the temple. Presumably the altar had been destroyed, hence no animal sacrifices are mentioned. It has been suggested that the book of Lamentations was written as part of a temple ritual or at least material to be recited at the site of the temple. See on Jer. 12:4; 13:19.

*Jeremiah 52:17 The Chaldeans broke the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh, and the bases and the bronze sea that were in the house of Yahweh they broke in pieces and carried all of their brass to Babylon-* The breaking in pieces was likely for ease of transportation. But it also symbolized the ending of the temple system. Israel had broken the covenant, and the only way back to God was to be through repentantly accepting His new covenant, as explained on Jer. 31.

*Jeremiah 52:18 They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the spoons and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered-* These things were kept in Babylon and then sent back with the exiles, by the special decree of Cyrus. The new covenant offered to Israel at the time in Jer. 31 was not a repeat of the law of Moses, but it did include similar rituals. The worship system of Ez. 40-48 was command more than prediction, and it utilized these vessels.

*Jeremiah 52:19 The captain of the guard took away the cups, the fire pans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the spoons and the bowls; that which was of gold, in gold, and that which was of silver, in silver-* We get the impression

that an orderly inventory was kept, with the vessels divided up according to their metal.

*Jeremiah 52:20 They took the two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh. The brass of all these vessels was without weight-* Although as noted on :21, the gold and silver was apparently weighed, and the bronze pillars measured.

*Jeremiah 52:21 As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a line of twelve cubits encircled it; and its thickness was four fingers. It was hollow-* It seems the Babylonians weighed the gold and silver and also noted the height and diameter of the pillars. When the vessels were returned to the temple they were also weighed. There is the impression given that the temple was not pillaged in a wanton way.

*Jeremiah 52:22 A capital of brass was on it; and the height of the one capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates on the capital all around, all of brass: and the second pillar also had like these, and pomegranates-* 2 Kings 25:17 gives "three cubits"; perhaps this smaller number is the actual measurement of the network of the capital, excluding the pomegranates.

*Jeremiah 52:23 There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates were one hundred on the network all around-* In 1 Kings 7:20,42 each pillar is said to have had two rows of pomegranates, 100 in each, the one above and the other below the ornamental network of the capitals. The "100" may be a rough summary. "On the sides" could mean 'visible outwards i.e. four of the hundred in each row were hidden owing to the nearness of the pillar to the wall of the porch; leaving 96 visible, as stated here. Or it could be translated "hanging loosely", i.e. four of the pomegranates were fixed to the network on the capitals, while the rest hung in festoons between them.

*Jeremiah 52:24 The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest-* An ancestor of Ezra (Ezra 7:1).

*And Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold-* The Zephaniah of Jer. 21:1 who refused to heed God's word and was associated with persecuting Jeremiah for speaking it (Jer. 29:25,29).

*Jeremiah 52:25 And out of the city he took an officer who was set over the men of war; and seven men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city-* Five men in 2 Kings 25:19. 'The seven who saw the king's face' was likely a technical term for his immediate courtiers or politburo, although they may have only numbered five men.

*And the scribe of the captain of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the midst of the city-* These sixty were surely not arbitrarily chosen, but were likely the priests in the temple "in the midst of the city", perhaps those whom Ezekiel had seen offering incense to the sun god in the temple precincts.

*Jeremiah 52:26 Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah-* They were obviously seen as representative of the civil and religious leadership of Judah. It was deemed that they needed to be killed so that there was no leadership left; but this then makes it all the more amazing that Zedekiah was not killed as God had said he would be. It would seem that he was the logical one to die. We recall how when the Medes took Babylon, there was little bloodshed but king Belshazzar was slain. All this was to highlight to Zedekiah the amazing grace of his survival, and it seemed he did respond in repentance (see on :11).

*Jeremiah 52:27 The king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away captive out of his land-* See on :26. I noted on :16 that perhaps the majority of Judah remained in the land. For most of the population were the poor masses. But the exile and destruction of the leadership is seen as "Judah" being carried away captive. But perhaps the phrase is used in order to connect with the description of the ten tribe kingdom being carried away captive out of his land (Am. 7:11,17; 2 Kings 17:23). It was as if to put a final end to Judah's supposition that was somehow morally better than Israel. They shared an identical judgment.

*Jeremiah 52:28 This is the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand and twenty-three Jews-* This is the deportation of Jer. 39:1. I noted on :1 that this chapter agrees almost word for

word with 2 Kings 24:18-25:30, although we note that the section about Gedaliah in 2 Kings 25:22-26 is omitted because the history of Gedaliah has been dealt with in more detail already in Jeremiah. It could be that the inspired editor of the book chose to as it were copy and paste the section from 2 Kings (with a few minor changes) as a helpful appendix to the book. But verses 28-30 give a different take on their equivalent in 2 Kings 24:1-20. It seems we should correct "seventh" into "seventeenth" (just as in 2 Chron. 36:9, for "eight" we should read "eighteen"); this avoids the number conflict with 2 Kings 24:14,16, which speak of those taken captive with Jehoiachin, earlier. The lower numbers in Jer. 52 are because they are omitting the Jews already taken into captivity in the previous incursions.

*Jeremiah 52:29 in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons-* These are those carried captive "from Jerusalem" itself, but not including those taken into exile after the capture of the city. The figures given in this section are far from complete, because Ezra 2:64 speaks of 42,360 returning, which is far more than went into captivity, even though perhaps the majority remained in Babylon. Perhaps like Israel in Egypt they multiplied supernaturally; or maybe many exiles from other nations and even Babylonians returned with them, being assigned to Jewish tribes and localities. And yet we must ever bear in mind that the Hebrew term "thousand" is often used for a grouping, rather than being a literal figure. But more likely we are reading here just of the leadership classes who were taken away.

*Jeremiah 52:30 in the twenty third year of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred and forty-five persons: all the persons were four thousand six hundred-* This deportation is not recorded elsewhere, although Josephus (*Antiquities* 10.9. 7) says that "Nebuchadnezzar in his 23rd year carried on considerable warlike operations in the direction of Palestine and in Egypt, carrying off Jews from that country to Babylon".

*Jeremiah 52:31 It happened in the thirty seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the twenty fifth day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison-* Lifting up the head out of prison recalls Joseph (Gen. 40:13,20); for the similarities with Joseph, see on :33.

*Jeremiah 52:32 and he spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon-* There is no reason given for this amazing grace toward Jehoiachin, who would have been considered the legitimate king of Judah. The lack of explanation is perhaps to simply highlight that it was indeed pure grace. He may well have repented, but that is not mentioned. We get the impression that God pitied His people in their well deserved captivity- simply because He so loved them.

*Jeremiah 52:33 and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life-* See on :34. The change of garments by the king would have recalled the experience of Joseph in Gen. 41:14. But Jehoiachin had not had the spirituality of Joseph, and he would have reflected upon that truth; and thereby perceived yet more the huge grace being shown him. We too may experience blessings which we are totally unworthy of, just so that we bow our heads in marvel at God's grace.

*Jeremiah 52:34 and for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him by the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life-* Reflect how Daniel refused to eat the food sent to him from the King of Babylon; but God arranged for this very thing to be sent to Jehoiachin as a sign of His recognition of his repentance (Jer. 52:34)! God saw that Jehoiachin wasn't on Daniel's level, and yet He worked with him on his lower level.

Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, "and I will draw out a sword after them" (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God's intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power, and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes his long prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). I can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what

they deserved. And He does the same with us- He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise.