1:5 Jeremiah is spoken of as having existed before birth. This wasn’t literally the case, but because God is outside time as we know it, He can speak of things which don’t exist as if they do, so total is His knowledge of the future (Rom. 4:17). All the believers and also Jesus are spoken of with this language (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20), but it doesn’t mean that He nor we personally pre-existed.

1:6 So many called to preach God’s word feel unworthy or unqualified to do so; but God delights to work through those who feel this way.

1:10 This reflects the power which there is in God’s word, which we also can speak forth to this world.

1:17 *Don’t be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you*- This appears to be the basis of Christ’s warning to His preachers, that if we are ashamed of His words in this generation, He will be ashamed of us in the last day and we will walk before all men with the shame of the rejected (Lk. 9:26; Rev. 16:15). We are to therefore see Jeremiah as in some sense representative of us in our witness to the world.

1:18 The prophets required this psychological strengthening to do their work; because seeing the world from God’s perspective, perceiving the tragedy of a humanity who refuse to accept His salvation, realizing the depth of His pain- is all too much. And God will strengthen us too, to be His witnesses in a similar world.

2:5 *Walked after vanity, and are become vain-* We become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). The prophets emphasize that the idols are empty and vain. Whilst we may not be tempted to worship pieces of stone or wood, we are surrounded by the vain things of the modern world which can become our gods; sport, endless surfing the internet, frivolous obsession with tickling our taste buds, these and so much else are mere vanity. And as we worship them, we become vain and empty too, with no real substance to our personality. Whilst the richness and depth of Yahweh is thereby ignored by us. See on 2:11.

2:6 The wilderness is described as an awful place, just as Moses likewise spoke of it when reflecting on the journeys of Israel in Deuteronomy. Israel crossing the Red Sea represents our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and their wilderness journey afterwards equates with our lives now as we walk toward the promised land of God’s Kingdom. The world is a terrifying place spiritually; in spiritual terms it isn’t the nice safe place it can appear.

2:8 *Those who handle the law didn’t come to know Me*- We can be faithful Bible readers, familiar with the text, and yet not know God in the sense of having a personal relationship with Him; rather like the rejected of the last day who will call Jesus “Lord” and have been associated with Him in their lives, but who never knew Him (Mt. 7:22,23; 25:12; Lk. 13:25).

2:11 Israel never officially changed their gods; they never rejected Yahweh nor were they atheists. But worshipping any other god *in addition* to the one true God as they did is effectively doing this. See on 2:5.

2:19 God has a wonderful way of not turning away in disgust from sinful people, but rather working through their sin to try to bring them to repentance. The traditional understanding of Satan is unable to explain this; for if a personal, sinful entity called ‘satan’ makes people sin, then how come that sin actually results in some becoming righteous? Sin comes from within (James 1:13-15), it is solely our fault that we sin; but God in His grace often works through human failure in order to bring sinners to Himself. Our real ‘satan’ or adversary is ourselves, and not any external, cosmic being.

2:26 Worshipping other gods is likened here to stealing. Not giving God our entire worship is in fact robbing Him; even though the analogy seems extreme at first sight, if we really accept that we are created by Him and are His, then to not give Him all of ourselves is to rob Him (Mal. 3:8). Significantly, the people are mentioned as punishing innocent people for the crime of stealing when they hadn’t committed it (:34). Those who robbed God knew subconsciously what they were doing; and so unconsciously, they transferred their guilt onto others, falsely accusing them of the very kind of sin *they* had committed, and then strictly condemning and punishing those innocent people for it, exercising the judgment against themselves which was their due on others, onto whom they had transferred their guilt. This is why people gossip, malign, falsely accuse and judge harshly. If we face up to our sins in the first place and accept God’s forgiveness, then we will show grace to others rather than act in this way.

2:30 It’s tragic that people can suffer so much, as Israel have throughout their history, and yet not respond to it as God intended.

3:1 God’s own law had forbidden a man to do this, calling it an abomination (Dt. 24:4). And yet God was willing to do so. Thus He demonstrates that His grace and love for His people goes even beyond the limits of His own word, and may even in a way contradict it; such is the greatness of His grace. He isn’t indifferently waiting for us to return to Him; He is willing to debase Himself and commit what He considers abomination in order to be back together with us. In similar vein, God speaks as if His expectation that Israel would return to Him had been as it were proved wrong (:7). Again, He speaks as if His foreknowledge was as it were limited compared to the power of the hopefulness of His love and grace; for we are made after God’s image, and true love has the quality of desperate hopefulness against our better knowledge. Such is God’s passion for us His people.

3:14 *I am a husband to you*- Although divorced from Israel (:8), God still considered Himself her husband. These contradictory feelings within God are expressed in His word, in that some passages protest His eternal love and relationship with Israel whatever, whilst others declare them no longer His people.

3:19,20 Although God presents Himself to us as having a memory which functions not unlike our memories, who are made in His image, there is with God the capacity for total recall of history; and hence His pain is far greater than ours, not least because He knows, with all the power of infinite analysis of possibilities, 'what might have been'. And it is the 'what might have been' syndrome which is one of the greatest sources of our emotional pain. His pain and hurt is therefore and thereby so much greater than ours. Hence the pain, the pain which comes from understanding and the potential of total recall, behind these words which reflect how Israel could have been sons which made Him proud. Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures to some extent, God feels rejected both by His children and by His wife at the same time. It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him. Yet now He has chosen *us* as His wife and children; and we are to do our uttermost to be His faithful woman, loyal children.

3:22-25 This was God’s fantasy about Israel, how one day they would say such words of repentance and return to Him. True love includes fantasy, imagining the object of our love speaking or acting in the way we dream of. And God’s passionate love for His people is no different. True repentance is such a thrill to God; it fulfils what He has dreamt of for us. Hence all the Angels rejoice when one sinner repents.

4:3 *Break up your fallow ground*- Like us, they were to realize their spiritual potential in order to bring forth fruit to God.

4:4 The wrath of God can be turned away or ‘quenched’ by the actions of those He is angry with (see too Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (see 18:20; Ps. 106:23; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God’s Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7).

4:13 Clouds, chariots and whirlwind are associated with Yahweh’s appearances in theophanies and as the cherubim. Yet here this language is applied to the Babylonian invaders- for they were manifesting God. Their chariots were as it were the wheels on earth of the Angel cherubim above who were directing them. At times unbelievers can be used by God as His form of manifestation, as we will experience in our lives too.

4:19 Jeremiah interjects here. He didn’t just output the words God had given him like a printer or piece of computer hardware. He saw the reality of it all, that it would really all come to pass. We too must be moved by the reality of the message we teach about the future; it is all very well telling others of a time of trouble coming upon this earth, but we should feel deeply for the human tragedy of it, to the point of being almost broken down because of it. The message we give cannot pass through our hands or lips without eliciting response from us.

4:20 Jeremiah felt that the future things he was prophesying had already come to pass; he shared God’s perspective (Rom. 4:17), as we should, that the Biblically predicted future is effectively now- so certain is God’s word of fulfilment.

4:31 *The anguish*- Jeremiah felt “anguish” right then (:19) because he identified with the future “anguish” of the people which he prophesied. We also should identify with the audience we preach to; the tragedy of their situation should touch us deeply and be the basis of our passionate, persuasive appeal to them.

5:1 All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed justice. This is the colossal significance to God of the individual. Abraham ceased at 10 people when interceding for Sodom, but if he had gone down to asking for the city to be spared for just one righteous person, likely he would’ve been heard. See on 26:13.

*Who does justice*- The Hebrew Bible very often demands “justice” from individuals within Israel and almost considers this to be the epitome of righteousness. We may consider that because we’re not judges nor part of the judicial apparatus of society, therefore this doesn’t apply to us. But daily if not hourly, we’re confronted with situations which demand our correct response, our fairness, our application of Divine principle when dealing with others, often to our own cost; and in our own minds, we do have to judge, not in the sense of condemning but in forming opinions. Thus “justice” is required from each of us, daily.

5:5 We see here Jeremiah’s naivety, assuming that the leaders of God’s people must surely be spiritual people. The disciples were the same, initially. We too easily tend to confuse status or seniority amongst God’s people with spirituality, and so often this assumption is wrong.

5:7 *When I had fed them to the full*- So often we find that comment that God’s kind material blessings to His people led them into unfaithfulness to Him (Dt. 32:15). It’s not surprising, therefore, that the requests of the new Israel for material blessing are so often unanswered; for God seeks relationship with us above all, and earnestly desires our eternal good.

*How can I pardon you?*- This opens a window on the self-questioning which is associated with God- e.g. "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?" (Hos. 6:4; 11:8; see too Jer. 9:7,9). These aren’t purely rhetorical questions- they reflect the actual and real self-questioning of Almighty God, reflective as it is of the turbulence of emotion which is part and parcel of being in a relationship which has gone painfully wrong. There even seems at times a difficulty on God's part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much (2:14,31;8:5,19; 30:6; Is. 5:4; 50:2). "What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?" (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love. 8:4-7 records God reflecting that even the stork 'returns' predictably; but His people have inexplicably not returned to Him. This reveals a powerful thing- that our rejection of God's love is inexplicable even to God Himself. And yet humanity persists in this utter madness. For all our education, business sense, scientific knowledge- we are revealed as inexplicably foolish in rejecting God's love and not 'returning' [repenting] to Him.

5:11 *It is not He*- A denial of the meaning of ‘Yahweh’- I am that I am. Yet they weren’t atheists. But by denying the reality of judgment to come and the constant, insistent presence of God in our lives and His continual claim upon every part of our lives, they were denying the essence of God- He is, who He is, and shall be who He shall be in our lives.

6:8 Here and in Ez. 23:18, 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 woundedness" (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 He “rejected” them (: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.

6:11 We may assume that it is the leaders of a corrupt society, the opinion formers, who should be punished. But God seems to emphasize here that it’s the apparently innocent members of society also who shall be punished- the children and the wives of the men who were the decision makers. The modern liberal mindset struggles with this kind of thing. But the picture is all the same of God holding an entire society culpable to judgment, as He did in punishing Egypt. It’s not that the individual doesn’t matter to God, nor that the righteous must perish with the wicked; but rather than the apparently insignificant individuals have more significance than we may imagine. Passive support of a corrupt regime is sinful and culpable for judgment; for holocausts happen when good people do nothing. There is in this sense no such person as the innocent bystander.

6:20 Israel weren’t atheists, and they still sacrificed to Yahweh; but Jeremiah makes it clear that external religion and mere intellectual assent isn’t enough. Effectively they had rejected Him for other gods.

6:21 *I will lay stumbling blocks*- There is a downward as well as an upward spiral in spiritual life; God at times deceives people so that they believe a lie, because they don’t love truth (2 Thess. 2:11). Note that it is a serious sin for *us* to be stumbling blocks to others; but God can morally do what we can’t. What *He* does at times, e.g. slaying the wicked, doesn’t always mean that *we* can do the same.

6:23 *Against you, daughter of Zion*- Yahweh was Israel’s God, and Zion, the temple built on Mount Zion, was His dwelling place. The pagan gods were intended to keep their temples and people safe from invaders; but the true God was quite different. He sent enemies against His own house to destroy it. The people of Judah would’ve had the same struggle to understand Him as those today who expect only good from their God.

6:26,27 Jeremiah was so merged with God that it’s hard to work out to whom the pronouns [“He”, “My”] refer- to God or Jeremiah. “Come upon *us*” may reflect how even in punishing His people for their sin, God was united with them.

7:10 The false ‘once saved always saved’ mentality leads to this kind of moral slackness. Only by enduring to the end will we be saved (Mt. 10:22).

7:13 *Rising up early*- Before the days of alarm clocks, rising before dawn required a great conscious mental effort. The words of the prophets weren’t effortlessly given by God and mindlessly relayed by them. They involved real conscious expenditure of effort by both God and the prophets.

7:16 *Don’t pray for this people* - only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them. 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. Jeremiah did however pray for his people even after this command; He knew God well enough to know that He is open to reason. At times, God reveals His intentions regarding Israel, but then the prophets make a case against this and are heard. This seems to be almost a pattern with God- to devise His purpose, and then in the 'gap' until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His people to change or amend those plans (Am. 3:7). It's as if He reveals His plans to the prophets so that they can then comment upon them in prayer. But in this case, God tells Jeremiah *not* to pray to Him to change His stated plans against Israel (cp. 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), as He had asked Moses to 'leave Me alone' and not try to persuade Him to change His mind (Ex. 32:10). He didn't want, in these cases, His stated plans to be interrupted by the appeals of His people to change them. Interestingly, in both these examples, Moses and Jeremiah know God well enough, the relationship is intimate enough, for them to still speak with Him- and change His mind. Those who've prayed to God in cases of terminal illness [and countless other situations] will have sensed this 'battle', this 'struggle' almost, between God and His friends, His covenant people, and the element of 'persuasion' which there is going on both ways in the dialogue between God and ourselves. The simple fact that God really can change- there are over 40 references to His 'repentance' in Scripture- is vital to understand- for this is the basis of the prayer that changes things, that as it were wrestles with God.

8:4 *Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return?*- 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. Pride often stops us turning back; we were so convinced we were right, and what will people think as they see us retracing our steps... 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 and we lack humility. Pride is the greatest barrier to repentance; pride is indeed the essence of sin.

8:4-7 See on 5:7.

8:5 The Hebrew word for “sliding back” is that translated “return”. 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. We are never passive in our spiritual path; we are either sliding back, or returning nearer to the Lord.

8:7 *But My people don’t know Yahweh’s law*- In the context, God is amazed that Israel won’t return- because usually there is a pattern of repentance in people, and even the birds return from where they migrated to. We expect to read ‘But My people don’t return to Me’; instead we read that they don’t know Yahweh’s law. The impact of God’s word, our sensitive Bible reading, should be that we return / repent.

8:11 Peace often refers to peace with God. One of the worst sins we can commit is to tell others that their sin is not sin and that they can have peace with God about it.

8:21,22 These could be Jeremiah’s words, or Yahweh’s; Jeremiah’s worldview merged very intensely with God’s, just as ours should. They felt for Judah even when Judah were suffering “hurt” for their sins, just as parents share the hurt of the punishment they may give their child.

9:1,2 Jeremiah’s feelings here are contradictory. On the one hand, he so loved the wayward children of God that he wished he could find more tears to weep for them; on the other, he wished to go right away from them and live in total isolation, like a lonely shepherd who has a booth in which he sleeps in the desert. All God’s true servants will have had these contradictory feelings; Jeremiah sets the example of ultimately sticking with God’s people, indeed at the end of the book we find him going down to Egypt with them, despite God warning them not to- when he could have had a respectable retirement in the wealth of Babylon. But we can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. The references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in:3 we have the speaker defined as God. So these were also God's thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them.

9:7 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.

9:9 *Such a nation as this*- 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”- 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 are to God issues of cosmic proportion. 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, Jeremiah passionately calls down judgment for “evil thoughts” and “evil hearts” (3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

9:18 *A wailing for us*- As God had lamented that the destroyer would come “upon *us*” (6:22,26). The “us” is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. 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. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question- if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God  is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God’s feelings at His peoples’ destruction. 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.

10:2 *The signs of the sky*- A reference to astrology. Our lives are totally in God’s hands.

10:19,20 This interjection by Jeremiah could equally be from God; both of them identified with the hurt and pain of those who were to be punished. We can understand why God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked- He finds it simply so painful (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). This alone is reason to reject the unBiblical myth of God allowing eternal punishment of the wicked in ‘hell’.

10:23 Wisdom must come from outside a person, from God’s word. There is no natural spiritual wisdom within human beings.

11:2 At times of Israel's apostasy, God reconfirmed Israel's covenant relationship with Him. Note how God calls them “My beloved” even whilst listing their sins and His future rejection of them (:15). His grace is so counter-instinctive. The height of the demand, the extent of the implication of being in covenant with God ought to preclude the possibility of worshipping anything else. The covenant we have entered has constant and binding claims upon our loyalty (Dt. 29:14-18). By reminding them of the nature of their covenant relationship at a time of their moral weakness, they were being led to realize that the life of sin was not for them. And so there should be a like awareness in us when at least weekly we are reminded of our covenant bond in the communion service, celebrating the blood of the covenant made with us.

11:13 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. 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). If we act like Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

11:17 *In provoking Me to anger*- This is Yahweh speaking, but earlier in the verse it’s Jeremiah speaking. So often in the prophets, the pronouns change quickly. One moment we have God speaking, the next, the prophet is responding in agreement, appealing to his people, or echoing the message in his own words. So in Is. 1:2,3 we have the direct words of God, ending with “They have rebelled against me… my people does not understand”. And then in Is. 1:4 we have Isaiah echoing back those thoughts of God: “They have forsaken the Lord”. Prophecies begin with God speaking in the third person, and end with Him speaking in the first person; and vice versa. In all these examples, we see God merging with His prophet, and vice versa (Am. 3:1; Is. 1:2-4; 3:1,4; Is. 5:1,2 cp. 3-6; 7; 10:12; 11:3,9; 22:17,19,20; 53:10,12; Is. 61:6,8; Jer. 4:1,2,21,22; 8:13,14; 11:17; 9:1,2; 23:9,11; Nah. 1:12,13). However, there was more than an echo going on between God and the prophet. There was a kind of dialectic in the Divine-human encounter. God is influenced by man, as well as man by God. This same mutuality between God and man is possible for us too (Rev. 19:10).

11:18 *You showed me their evil deeds*- Ezekiel was likewise shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity to the amount of sin around them must’ve been so hard, as it is for us. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. Hence 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 (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; for the spirit of the prophets is what our testimony to Jesus is all about (Rev. 19:10).

12:1 Any doubts we have about the justice and ethics of God’s ways must begin with the acceptance that God is right; therefore the difficulties we have are a result of our limitations rather than any ultimate fault with Him.

12:7 *I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies*- This is how difficult it was for God to punish His beloved people. He doesn’t do it from spite nor from the pleasure of retribution. The way God calls Judah His “beloved” (also 11:15; Is. 5:1) at the time of punishing her is reflected by the way in which Jesus calls Judas “friend” in the very moment of betrayal (Mt. 26:50). In wrath He remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

12:14-17 Here we have another potential prophecy- Judah could have completely returned from captivity in Babylon, and their captors could have accepted Israel’s God and returned with them to a blessed life in a restored kingdom. But neither the Jews nor Babylonians / Persians really wanted it.

13:7 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.

13:15-17 For all the issues which the prophets could have condemned people for, pride was high on their list. “I hate the pride of Jacob”, Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah wept in secret, his eyes running with tears, “for your pride”. Do we weep privately, just to ourselves, because people don’t respond to our message? Only those who have a heart that bleeds will do so. We can’t have an indifferent, take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

13:22,26 The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel as His wife 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), and here, she is to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed. 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. 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 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. But 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. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences. 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 yet 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 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.

14:8,9 God is presented as a tragic figure here, desolated by the loss of His people, left as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land; as Israel wandered amongst the nations (:10), so God as it were wanders too, so identified with them is He. This is how difficult it is for God to punish His people; for He so suffers in their suffering. It is in a sense therefore ‘easier’ for Him to forgive and save us.

14:17 *The virgin daughter of my people*- Yet Israel are elsewhere in Jeremiah described as a sexually addicted prostitute, and the rape hinted at here is understood in 13:22,26 as the deserved punishment she received from the Babylonians. We have here a reflection of God’s own divided mind about His sinful people; on one hand loving them and seeing them as innocent, on the other, recognizing their sin and who they really were.

14:20 *We have sinned*- Again we see Jeremiah’s identity with His people, not considering himself somehow uninvolved with their failures.

15:1 The implication is that when an individual or group of God’s people have a modicum of spirituality, then one individual like Moses is able to make Him feel positively toward them. The power of third party intercession for others means that we should constantly be in prayer for our brethren. But ‘the power of one’ works the other way, too; for :4 speaks as if all Judah suffered because of the *sins* of one man.

15:15 Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in :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, then 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” (: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. This incident is also another example of how God’s preachers so often don’t want to do the work; God tends to use those who are weak and feel inadequate to share His word with others, not the fluent and self-assured.

15:16 Jeremiah had found God’s word and eaten it, and as a result, “I am called by Your name”- 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 (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” (6:11). No wonder these prophets 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 (Rev. 19:10).

15:17 Jeremiah “sat alone”. Not only was the prophets’ 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. They and their message was therefore rejected.

15:19 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. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Jeremiah and Judah turned in repentance, then God would return / restore them to their land; 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.

16:7 The communion meal is in one sense designed to be for our comfort as we mourn the death of Jesus.

16:13 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”. But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there (s.w. Esther 4:8; Esther 8:5). God was gracious [s.w. ‘to show favour’] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jeremiah 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 (: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 (:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would “cause them to know My hand… and they shall now that My name is Yahweh” (:21).

16:18 *I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double*- But God punished Israel *less* than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13). He surely said this :18 in anger, and later relented. He is revealed as an emotional, passionate God.

17:1 The simple interpretation of this would be that sin has permanent consequences upon our heart or mind.

17:9 In the context, this is a description of the state of Judah’s heart at Jeremiah’s time (18:12). Our hearts are indeed deceitful, but God judges us according to what is in our heart (:10). It’s not the case that we are born with a sinful heart and so we will inevitably be condemned for having one. The Lord Jesus was of our human nature and yet He never sinned; whatever we say about human nature we say about Him.

17:10 God searches our heart in order to judge our works; because how we think is how we act- in the end.

17:13 The first half of the verse is Jeremiah praying to God; God responds in the second half of the verse; and the prayer resumes in :14. Prayer isn’t simply requests, it involves meditation, reflections and thinking of God’s response.

17:25 If Judah had been obedient, it’s possible that God’s Kingdom as it was in the form of Israel could have developed into His full Kingdom on earth. He has set up all kinds of potential situations throughout history, which tragically have been unfulfilled because of human weakness.

17:27 This eternal fire is paralleled with God’s eternal wrath (:4). The punishment for the wicked is eternal death (Rom. 6:23); not conscious existence in fire. Fire consumes back to dust. The eternity of God’s anger will be in the sense that sinners will be punished by eternal death; but death is unconsciousness.

18:4-8 The clay clearly represents people, made as we are from dust. God’s purpose is in some sense open-ended, in that He has intentions for us which can be ruined by how we poorly respond to the potter’s hand. This doesn’t mean that God’s words of judgment or promise are unreliable; but rather that His sensitivity to human behaviour us such that He will change His intention in accordance with their response to His statement of those intentions. God’s statement that He would destroy Nineveh in 40 days is maybe the clearest example; He added no conditions, just stated this would happen. And yet they repented; and He changed and didn’t fulfil His specific word of judgment.

18:8 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 18:8- if a nation repents, then God will repent. But in this case, God accepted the singular prayer of Moses as if it were the prayer of the whole community. We can influence God positively for others’ blessing.

18:20 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 Your wrath from them”. Jeremiah like us was as it were a bridge between God and man; as a prophet he saw the world through the eyes of God, and yet he was himself a man.

19:9 This verse in the LXX seems to be alluded to by Paul when he says that we today can bite and devour one another in gossip and slander (Gal. 5:15). By doing so, we will be living out our condemnation, acting as if we are Judah under Divine judgment at the hands of the Babylonians.

19:11 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 (cp. 18:4-6). The point of the Lord's quotation is surely that those He rejects will share the world's condemnation.

19:15 *I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced*- This may appear to be stating the obvious, until we appreciate that God pronounced the evil whilst being fully open to changing His mind about it- see on 18:4-8. God is therefore saying here that the time of His openness to persuasion against His intention to destroy them is now closing. Every moment we live, we live within the frames of amazing possibilities in terms of dialogue with our gracious, open-ended God.

20:6 Publically, Jeremiah appears bold and undeflected by opposition and persecution. But :7-10 show how internally, he was so sensitive to it all. When we feel the same, we can remember Jeremiah.

20:7 Despite the unity of spirit between God and Jeremiah, 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. Here Jeremiah complains: “Yahweh, You have seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I was seduced; You are stronger than me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome” (Abraham Heschel’s translation understands “stronger than” to imply rape; most translations are too embarrassed to render the words as they really are). The extreme language isn’t surprising given that Jeremiah was suicidal (:14-18) and likely bi-polar- consider how he oscillates between praise in :13 and a death wish in :14. So here in :7 Jeremiah is 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 inappropriately taken over. And yet in 15:16 he says that he had found God’s word and eaten it of his own freewill, and as a result, “I am called by Your name”- the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband’s name (Is. 4:1). But here, Jeremiah felt he had been forcibly used and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. But he reasons himself through it, until in :13 he can come to again praise Yahweh in ecstasy, and recognize that he had simply revealed to God how he felt in that moment, which God knew anyway because He sees and knows all things (:12).

20:14 Here Jeremiah quotes Job’s words; even in his depression, he perceived the similarities between himself and other depressed Biblical heroes.

21:6 *They shall die of a great plague*- There seems no record of this happening, indeed the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem wasn’t as awful as it could have been; because God in His love and grace for a faithless people reduced the judgment threatened? Likewise the threat that none would be spared (:7) must be compared against the fact that many Jews were saved alive and taken into captivity in Babylon.

21:9 By surrendering to the Babylonians they would be expressing their recognition that they had indeed sinned, and should rightfully be placed in the hands of their enemies.

21:12 Even at this very late stage, with Jerusalem surrounded (:2,4), God was prepared to relent and not fulfil all the prophetic words of destruction; His wrath was still capable of being quenched. Unquenchable or eternal fire therefore refers to the wrath of God which has reached such a point that it can no longer extinguished; but once the objects of that wrath are ‘burnt’, as the metaphor requires, they will not exist eternally in that burning process. Notice that the one thing He so wished to see was “justice”- because this is the epitome of so much spirituality and right behaviour. This is how very sensitive He is to how we treat each other.

22:2 Jeremiah must’ve been so nervous when he learnt to whom he must preach. He’s have had to take a deep breath to say these things, just as we have to when trying to swing a conversation around to witnessing to Christ to those we feel awed by or would far rather not witness to.

22:3 In giving Israel the reasons for their destruction, God parallels their breaking covenant with Him, with their injustice (21:12; 22:3,9,13). Mal. 2:8,10,14 speaks of how a broken covenant with God is related to a broken covenant with our brethren and our partner. The nature of our covenant relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with each other. If we sense the grace of God shown to us in covenant relationship, we will respond by having justice and integrity toward others in all our ways, awed as we will be by the certainty and reliability of His grace to us through His covenant with us.

22:6 Note the dramatic contrast within this verse. God so loved Judah, He saw them as beautiful, and yet with those feelings in mind He was going to destroy them. They were so wicked and rebellious against them, but truly He loved them with a father’s love. His punishment of them wasn’t the offended wrath of a capricious deity. If God has such love for the condemned and rebellious just because they are His children; how much more confident can we be of His grace toward us who are in Christ.

22:13-19 This is a 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; God and the prophets were so sensitive to that kind of abuse of power. No matter how poor we may be, we each have power in some form over others in the context of our relationships with them, and we are not to misuse it.

22:16 To know God means to have an active relationship with Him, which will involve showing care and justice towards the poor.

22:22 *Surely then you will be ashamed* - God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah’s repentance and return to Him. But actually the very opposite happened. It’s rather like “They will reverence My son” (Mt. 21:37)- when actually they crucified Him. It’s 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.

22:24 God's knowledge of possible futures is brought out several times in Jeremiah. He considered how even if Coniah were the signet upon His right hand, yet He would still have to uproot Israel. He fantasized about how if the prophets had been faithful and if Israel had heard them, then Israel would have repented (23:22). This reveals the extent of His passion for us; and it’s this knowledge which must make His experience of us so tragic and sad, more than we can ever know. He knows all the infinite numbers of possible futures there could have been if we were more faithful. This thought alone should inspire us to try to live up more to our potentials, to trade our talents, and thus to experience His working with us.

23:2 Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having ‘driven out’ Israel from their land (: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.

23:5 Jesus was the final fulfilment of this “branch”; He was a branch of David in the sense that He had David as His ancestor (Lk. 1:31-35). He therefore didn’t pre-exist as a person before the time of David.

23:6 *Yahweh our righteousness*- Jesus never sinned, He was as righteous as God in His character. By baptism into Him, that righteousness is counted to us; and thereby He is for us the means to God’s righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

23:10 Human “might is not right”; human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. One of the most striking features of the prophets is their denunciation of human power. Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God’s heart. The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we’d surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord’s work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God’s heart broke because His people were and are like this (:9).

23:12 *They shall be driven on, and fall*- God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose.

23:18 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. The prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His “council” (:22), i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (see too 15:19). The way God speaks of the prophets as being His “council” suggests He is open to dialogue and even ‘advice’ from men; such is His humility and desire to work with us rather than merely demand our submission.

23:36 The false prophets were judged according to their words; each man’s word was to be his burden at the day of Babylonian judgment . 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. Wrong speech will be condemned at the day of judgment (Tit. 2:8), out of our own mouths we will be judged (Lk. 19:22). The implication seems to be that our words will be quoted back to us during the judgment process. By our words we really will be justified or condemned (Mt. 12:37). How we speak, especially if we claim to bear God’s Name as baptized believers, will be the basis of our judgment.

24:3 It was obvious what Jeremiah had seen; but God asked him to verbalize it. By putting things into words out loud, we become the more conscious of them. It’s no bad idea to pray our private prayers out loud, to recount out loud to God our situations so that we perceive them more accurately rather than just assuming that we have internally assessed the situation correctly.

24:8 The spiritually weakest were those who remained in the land and went down into Egypt. Yet when given the choice of going to Babylon or remaining with these people, Jeremiah chose to remain with them, knowing they were the weakest. If we truly seek God’s glory in people, it may be that we in some ways make the choice to be with the weak so that by all means we may save some; when the nicer thing to do is to associate only with the spiritually stronger.

25:3 *Rising up early and speaking*- Just as God also did (:4). In our witness to the world, we are especially united with God. He is speaking through us; our feelings of disappointment, discouragement and rejection are in a sense His feelings; our joy at converting another is His joy. In this sense Jesus says He will be personally with us as we obey the commission to take His message to all the world (Mt. 28:20).

25:8 *Because you have not heard My words*- Time and again, ignoring God’s word is presented as the main reason for Judah’s condemnation. The people would’ve heard Jeremiah teaching and preaching, and simply shrugged. They may have accepted him as a prophet, but they were not prepared to have their lives disrupted by his message; they were fine as they were, too busy (as they thought). The fact they didn’t take seriously the emotional man from Anathoth was the basis of their condemnation. Yet they loyally went to the temple (26:2) and offered sacrifice. They weren’t atheists. They simply didn’t take God’s word seriously. People are just the same today. We likewise should be aware that our easy access to God’s word today makes us very much accountable. We ought to be reading it at least daily and seriously trying to conform our lives and thinking to it.

25:9 *And against all these nations around*- Judah’s sin lead to other nations suffering. People suffer the effects of others’ sin, as we see in the consequence of Adam’s sin. This isn’t because God punishes the righteous with the wicked, but because He allows people the freewill to sin; and the sinfulness of sin is in the harmful effect it has upon others.

25:15 Being given a cup of wine to drink from God is a double symbol- of condemnation, as here, or of blessing and salvation (1 Cor. 10:16). This is why our drinking of the cup of wine at the communion service is a step either to our eternal blessing or condemnation, and this is why we are powerfully helped by the symbol to examine ourselves at that meeting especially, knowing that we have only one of two possible destinies- eternal death or the blessing of eternal life (1 Cor. 11:29). And there is no way out by simply refusing to drink it- for if we refuse, we shall be made to drink it to our condemnation (:28).

25:18-26 We seem to have here a chronological prediction of the nations which Babylon attacked and destroyed, beginning with Jerusalem (:29); and finally Sheshach, a code name for Babylon, drinks the cup of destruction herself.

26:2 *Perhaps they will listen*- This leads in to the implications that God doesn't actually know for sure how His people will respond to His word. So great is the freewill we have been given as we in our generation read and hear the words of the Bible. God of course *could* know our response, but at times He limits His knowledge in the same way as He limits His power- in that He *could* do all things but He doesn’t do all He’d like to do because of our limitation of Him. The limitation of God is shown by how He speaks about prayer: "The Lord's... ear [is not] dull, that it cannot hear... your sins have hid His face from you so that He will not hear" (Is. 59:1,2). In this sense God limits His possibilities. He can see all things, and yet in the time of Israel's apostasy He hides His face from them (Mic. 3:4 cp. Dt. 32:19,20). The Hebrew word ulay, 'perhaps', is significant in this connection. "Perhaps they will listen", God says, in reflection upon Ezekiel's preaching ministry to God's people (Ez. 12:1-3). Of Jeremiah's prophetic work, God likewise comments: "Perhaps [Heb. ulay] they will listen" (:2,3; 36:3,7; 51:8; also Is. 47:12). This uncertainty of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us, too. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! 'Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond?'.

26:8 *You shall surely die*- People get very angry when we say things which criticize their relationship with God and their behaviour before Him, and suggest that their established way of worship is wrong.

26:19 In Hezekiah’s time, all Judah had to repent to avert total destruction- but even though they didn’t, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation. This is the power of just one righteous person, God is so sensitive to righteousness. In the Old Testament there are several examples of just one righteous man saving the sinful or spiritually weak people of God from destruction; and those cases were to prepare Israel for the concept of the supreme righteousness and intercession of Christ being able to save we who are likewise sinners.

27:3 *The messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah*- Instead of trusting solely in God, Zedekiah was trying to make alliances with other nations to stave off the Babylonian invasion. But the message was again that all such human might would fail, and total repentance was the only way for Judah to be saved.

27:5 If God takes away from us what we have been accustomed to having- in Judah’s case, their independence as a nation- then we should recognize that God as creator of all has the right to do this, and that nothing we have, be it material or immaterial, is personally ours. This is one outcome of believing in God as creator rather than in atheistic evolution.

27:6 *And the animals of the field also*- This is emphasized several times. We see thereby God’s huge sensitivity to the natural creation. It also opens up the possibility that there is a latent spirituality within all of creation; God is in some sense in contact with them. Rom. 8:19-23 seems to hint that the natural creation will in some sense be delivered into a new spiritual dimension at Christ’s return and the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth.

27:14 Speaking God’s truth made Jeremiah everybody’s enemy. His own people, from the masses to the leadership, the religious leaders and their false prophets, the surrounding Gentile nations- all were insulted by what he had to say. There are times in our own ministries when we will be left alone because of our loyalty to God’s word- or so it will seem.

27:21 It would appear that the expensive vessels of God’s house had been taken into the house of the king. We must learn the lesson, not to use the things of God’s spiritual house for our own personal benefit.

28:3,4 Hananiah had taken Jeremiah’s prophecies of restoration but said it would happen within two years rather than the 70 years which Jeremiah had spoken of in chapter 25. And he inserted a false prediction that Jeconiah would return from Babylon. False teaching follows this pattern; slightly changing God’s true word and slipping in a few other things. This is what makes false religion attractive, and why it will be accepted by those who aren’t familiar with God’s word. We live in a world where there are many voices, many claims, clamouring for our belief; only a familiarity with the Bible text and an acceptance of it as the final authority will enable us to discern truth from error.

28:11 *The prophet Jeremiah went his way*- There are times in such conflict situations when we too just have to walk away. God’s says one thing, and the popular religious leaders say another. We can make our point and then walk away from endless argument and controversy.

28:13 *Go, and tell Hananiah*- Jeremiah may well have thought ‘Oh no, I never want to see that man again’. But the motive and purpose of correcting false teaching is for the sake of helping those who are deceived.

29:5,6 By doing so, the exiles would be expressing their faith that God’s word about a 70 year captivity was going to be true. The Jewish false prophets in Babylon were telling them that the captivity would soon be over and they would be back in the land of Judah (:8). False teaching tries to tell us that we can have the restored Kingdom now, with no need to wait long, no need to accept our sinfulness nor truly repent.

29:7 *Pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace*- Alluded to in 1 Tim. 2:1,2 about how we should pray for the nations in which we live, that we might be able to live in peace.

29:15 The sin of the Jewish captives in exile would bring about suffering on the Jews who then remained in the land (:16,17). Again we see that sin is about the damage we do to others.

29:23 *And have committed adultery*- Repeatedly, the false prophets of both Old and New Testaments are associated with immoral behaviour. Wrong beliefs about God often lead to wrong behaviour; false teaching is often wrong teaching about way of life, rather than being simply honestly mistaken in theological interpretation of the Bible.

*I am He who knows, and am witness*- It’s not painless to simply say that we believe God’s Name is Yahweh and that this means “I am”. He therefore sees and knows all things because He “is” in all ways, and our lives must be appropriate to Him being as He is. Note that God is presented as both witness and judge. Our lives are as it were played out before the Divine courtroom.

29:26 The whole tremendous experience of having God’s mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There’s a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them… would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there’s no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

30:7 *That day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble*- Dan. 12:1 says the same thing in the same language, but says that the ultimate salvation of Israel will be in the appearance of Christ and the resurrection from the dead (Dan. 12:2,3). The Babylonian invasion was known as the time of Israel’s trouble (2:28; 8:15; 11:12; Neh. 9:32). There was the possibility that the Babylonian invasion and capture of Jerusalem was the time of trouble which would lead to Israel’s final salvation in the coming of their Messiah; but instead they chose to believe their false prophets and refused to repent. So the whole possible scenario didn’t come true then, and was reapplied to a latter day invasion of Israel, the taking of Jerusalem, Israel’s repentance, hearing the words of the true prophets, the return of Christ, the resurrection and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. That scenario could now come true at any moment.

30:17 *I will restore health to you*- Although their wound was humanly incurable (:12,15). God really can do the impossible, and impossible thing we struggle with is that sinners condemned to suffering and death can really be saved from that and given eternal life.

*Zion, whom no man seeks after*- The attitude of others to us God’s people is so painful for Him. He desperately seeks His people, and for others to consider we are down and out, not wanted by anyone, provokes Him to action. Even though His people were so sinful, the fact others mocked them was significant to God. This colossal sensitivity of God is an encouragement to us who can feel at times that we are insignificant and ultimately, existentially alone.

30:18 We see here the theme of God’s Kingdom actually being a re-establishment of the entity which once was on earth (Ez. 21:25-57; Acts 1:6). See too :20 “as before”.

31:13 This is what shall happen after Rachel weeps for her slain children (:15) and she enters the new covenant (:31). She will be 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 (:13). Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to the once weeping Rachel, who wept over the children God had taken from her. And yet... according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of :31, this is the very same 'new covenant' into which we enter in baptism (Heb. 8:8,13; 12:24). This is God's joy over us, and it should be ours over Him. The damage of sin can at times seem so permanent that we can feel that nothing whatever can change things for us now, as Rachel weeping for her children. But the dramatic transformation really can happen when we enter into the new covenant. It’s hard to put together how God will slay Rachel’s children with thirst, forget them and show them no pity (Hos. 2:3,4; 4:6; 9:12), 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 is indeed 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, anger 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. 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 passionless, too busy, postmodern world.

31:22 *A woman shall follow after a man*- It was unheard of for a woman to take the initiative in starting a romance leading towards marriage; the man always chose his woman. Hence Ruth and Naomi’s outstanding initiative regarding Boaz. Our repentance is presented here as a woman taking the initiative to as it were woo God Almighty; who as it happens has a heart that yearns for her anyway (:20). This is the strange romance of repentance, a mutual attraction that lasts for eternity. And the grace of it all is that this initiative of Judah for God, this new thing in the earth, was created by Him.

32:8 *Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh*- To buy property in a land terrorized by the Babylonians and about to be taken over by them (note the date given in :1), as God Himself had predicted, seemed pointless and foolish. There was only any point in doing this if it would result in Jeremiah’s family gaining the land at a future date, but it seems from 16:2 that Jeremiah had no children. But sometimes God asks us to do such counter-instinctive things that we know that this just has to be His hand. Likewise Peter tested whether it was really Jesus walking on the water by saying that if it was Jesus, then only He would ask him to come walking on the water; only the Lord would ask us to do such counter-instinctive things (Mt. 14:28).

32:15 The repeated emphasis upon witnessing the purchase and making it legal was because at the end of the 70 years captivity, land would again be valuable and be bought and sold; and this land which Jeremiah was buying would therefore be a valued part of his family’s inheritance. So God was asking Jeremiah to put his money where his mouth was for the sake of the hope of the restored Kingdom which he was preaching. Sometimes God asks us to do the same; to make a sacrifice, even a financial one, for the sake of the hope of the Kingdom which we profess to others.

32:23 *Done nothing of all that You commanded*- Yet they were *partially* obedient; even within Jeremiah we see evidence of them offering sacrifices. But giving only part of our hearts to God is effectively giving nothing; the lesson is the demand for whole heartedness in devotion. Hence :30 says that Israel “have done *only* that which was evil in My sight from their youth”. Another window onto this is to understand that when someone believes, righteousness is imputed to them; but to the unbeliever, sin is imputed (Rom. 4:8). Hence all the blood of the prophets was counted upon those who slew Jesus (Mt. 23:35). We cannot therefore simply choose not to believe and claim some kind of neutrality before God; sin will be added to our existing sins (Ps. 69:27).

32:25 Although Jeremiah did what God commanded and openly justified it to others on the basis that one day, God’s promised restoration would happen- yet he evidently struggled within himself and with God about this issue. We may appear confident in faith and hope in the future Kingdom, and so may others, but who knows the internal struggles going on within us all.

32:37 *Out of all the countries*- The Babylonians scattered the Jews amongst all their empire. Hence the book of Esther describes how the Jews were to be found in all 127 provinces of the empire; the command to kill them and then to save them had to be written in all those different languages (Esther 8:9; 9:30).

32:40 *I will put My fear in their hearts*- Part of the new covenant involved God giving those included in it a new heart (:39), putting His word within their minds (31:33). Whilst we of our own freewill have to be prepared to enter that covenant with God, our salvation isn’t by our works nor by our steel willed mastery of our own minds; God works within the human heart, to some extent even giving us spirituality.

32:44 These were exactly the things which Jeremiah had been asked to do right then, *before* this promised time of restoration of the Kingdom. The command wasn’t simply so that his relatives’ descendants might be blessed by his obedience with some land to the family name (note the implication in 16:2 that he didn’t have his own children); rather was it an invitation to him to live out the Kingdom life in this life, even though the environment was very much not the time of God’s restored Kingdom, in fact the very opposite. We too are invited to experience the Kingdom life in some ways even now.

33:7 *As at the first*- One proof that the future Kingdom of God will be on earth rather than in Heaven is because that Kingdom is to be a restoration of the Kingdom of God as it had been in the form of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The language of restoration “as at the first” is a major theme in Jeremiah- note “yet again” (:10).

33:10 *That are desolate*- They were not at that moment desolate (:1), but God’s prophetic word is so certain that what He predicts will happen is spoken of as if it already exists. Likewise :12 “which is waste”.

33:15 Israel’s return from the nations where they had been scattered would be associated with the coming of Messiah to lead them once they had returned. It seems from Haggai 2 and Zech. 4 that Zerubbabel [meaning ‘branch brought from Babylon’] could have fulfilled these prophecies. But due to the prosperity in captivity which the Jews attained (see Esther 10), most chose not to return to the land, and those who did weren’t willing to obey God’s law. Indeed, extra-Biblical history records that Zerubbabel returned to Babylon. So the “branch” prophecies were reapplied to Christ; by baptism into Him, God’s righteousness is counted to us. We live at a time when the Jews are literally scattered worldwide; around the time when they return to the land, Christ will come as “the branch” to restore God’s Kingdom on earth. We may yet have to see a far greater return to the land than happened since the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel.

34:11 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 :11,22 offers 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.

34:17 *Among all the kingdoms of the earth*- The Hebrew *eretz* means both “earth” as in the sense of the whole planet, and also “the land” promised to Abraham. This ambiguity helps us understand how the restoration prophecies could have had their fulfilment in the regathering of the Jews scattered throughout the 127 provinces of the Babylonian and then Persian empires, which straddled the land promised to Abraham; and yet they will now have their major fulfilment in our last days, in the restoration of Israel from their dwelling places in literally the entire planet.

34:18 This speaks of how the Jews must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that 'So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise'. God too has cut such a covenant commitment to us. In Genesis 15, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham and to us Abraham’s seed by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29); and He passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals to confirm it. But it was none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals- but in Gen. 15, only Yahweh did. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is- that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. We simply can't be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern- and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant.

35:14 Jonadab’s requirements of his descendants were unreasonable. There was nothing wrong in drinking wine nor in owning vineyards or living in a house. Indeed, all these three things are listed amongst the blessings which God would give Israel in Canaan (Dt. 6:11; 8:12; Ps. 104:15). But the point is that if other people can show such careful obedience to human commands, even if they are unnecessary and increasingly irrelevant- how much more should we be obedient to God’s word. All around us are great examples of single minded dedication of life- to wrong principles. Self-sacrificial humanitarian atheists are ever before us with their good deeds. Men give their lives to and for what they believe and for political leaders- even though those beliefs are faulty and the leaders have feet of clay. How much more committed should we be... faced as we are with the ultimate truths of God and His Son. *If they can do* *it*- why can’t we, and why can’t we do even more than them? We can also reflect that Jonadab asked his descendants to not indulge in the legitimate blessings which God had given (houses, wine and vineyards). There are different levels in spiritual life; we can grab what blessings God gives us and run with them; or we can forego them, give them to others, use them for Him, refuse them simply to exercise the spiritual muscles of our self-control.

36:2 Jeremiah was asked to write down his words *so that perhaps* Judah would repent (:3). God recognized that by regularly reading those words there was a far higher chance the message might sink in and they would be motivated to action. Hearing God’s word read to us is one thing, but reading it ourselves is another process. We who are literate and have Bibles are greatly blessed with the potential for really getting to grips with God’s word in a manner which others haven’t been blessed with. To waste and fritter away that responsibility in favour of trashy novels is something we shall have to give account for.

36:3 God says that perhaps Judah would *hear His word* and repent; in :7 Jeremiah repeats this by saying that perhaps Judah would *pray* and repent. True prayer is therefore a reflection of our hearing of God’s word. His word influences ours. If the Lord’s word abides in us, then prayer becomes powerful, as our will merges with that of God in our requests (Jn. 15:7).

36:9 The paradox is that the leadership fasted, but didn’t ultimately want to hear God’s word. Even such self-deprivation is of no meaning unless we are going to be guided by God’s word.

36:19 It’s a common feature of human response that we tend to ‘shoot the messenger’, and this is supremely true when it comes to response to someone preaching repentance and God’s demands upon human life. This is the main psychological reason behind religious persecution. The source of discomfort must be removed from our presence or even destroyed.

36:23 As noted on :19, the natural human response to God’s word prodding at their conscience is to remove it, to shoot the messenger. In our day one way of getting rid of the inconvenient demands of God’s word is to declare parts of it uninspired by Him; not really His word, just the local views of the time; or to embark upon complex academic attempts to cloud the obvious message with a cloud of uncertainty, radical re-translation and polemics.

36:24 *They were not afraid*- But when they first heard those words, they were afraid (:16). Our response to and even interpretation of God’s word is so often influenced by those around us. In the presence of unbelievers we can be tempted to see it the way they do... Bible reading and response has to be a totally personal enterprise, and at times it calls us to be prepared to stand alone, with our backs to the world if necessary.

37:12 Later in Jeremiah, we read of how Jeremiah was given the choice of honourable retirement in Babylon, or to remain with God’s spiritually weak people in the land. He chose to stay with them, and even went down into Egypt with the weakest of them. Perhaps he learnt to do that from his experience at this time. We too are taught by failures in one situation to be stronger the next time we are faced with the choice. It seems he had had enough and just wanted to get away from the aggressive, rejective audience he had in Jerusalem. It is hinted in 32:25 that Jeremiah may have somewhat resented having to buy the field, so that perhaps his family relatives would inherit it at the time of the restored Kingdom in 70 years time, after his death. So he wanted to enjoy it now. And for these things he suffered. We can’t have the hope of eternity *and* enjoy it now, even if we may have some foretastes of it.

37:17 Those who know God's word will find encouragement there in their experiences of life- but that encouragement is dependent upon their appreciation of the word, and their ability to see the similarities between their situation and that of others who have gone before. Thus 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 (see too :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. One of the many reasons for daily Bible reading is that we become familiar with the text of Scripture, and can more easily perceive the similarities between our life situations and those of Bible characters who have gone before us.

38:7 *Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch*- As a dark skinned foreigner who was well known to be a eunuch, he would likely have been despised within Jerusalem society. But it was exactly the despised who God loves to use as tools to save His people. And it’s exactly these types who have the empathy to be able to reach out to save those like Jeremiah. We too can be such people, if we meditate enough upon who we really are and the significance of our sins.

38:16 *Who made us this soul*- The fact we had our lives created by God means we should never taken another’s life apart from at His specific command.

38:23 You shall cause this city to be burned 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, his fear of his image amongst men who were themselves condemned and on borrowed time, meant that judgment came on all 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.

38:22 *Your feet are now sunk in the mire*- The emphasis would’ve been on “*your* feet”. Jeremiah witnessed to Zedekiah on the basis of bridge building. Jeremiah warned him that politically and spiritually, *his* feet were sunk in the mud - just after Jeremiah himself had sunk in the mud and been miraculously delivered from it (:6). We must build bridges into the real world in which the people who are our audience live and love, work and play, laugh and weep, struggle and suffer, grow old and die. We do this by revealing to them that we too are human, we’re not knights in shining armour; and we seek to relate our experiences to theirs, so that there is that point of ‘flash’ where we as it were catch each others’ eye, and are united by experience. It is from that point that we have won their trust and can proceed to credibly share the doctrinal content of the Gospel with them. The more real, the more credible.

39:5 The parable of the good Samaritan features a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and being attacked, to be saved by grace when no human help could assist him (Lk. 10:30). The wounded man represents us all, and yet he is modelled upon Zedekiah. This weak king who loved hearing God’s word and wanted to do the right thing but was simply weak and gave in to the pressure of circumstance and thereby seriously sinned- is representative of each of us.

39:10 These very poor people didn’t show themselves spiritually strong, whereas at least some of the more prosperous who were taken to Babylon did repent and some returned to the land after 70 years. Poverty doesn’t always mean spirituality; for the problem with poverty is that it can become obsessive and distracts people from God.

39:18 *Because you have put your trust in me*- Ebedmelech is commended for his faith, and yet at the same time God points out his fear (:17). Ideally, faith should preclude fear. Ebedmelech feared, and yet he still believed. Perhaps faith is rarely total in human beings, but God accepts that all the same, in His grace. Note that Ebedmelech is promise deliverance because of his faith- when we would have expected him to be given deliverance because he had delivered God’s prophet Jeremiah. Thus we see that good works are not on their own of significance to God; it is faith in Him which is of the essence.

40:4 *All the land is before you*- Jeremiah would have recalled how Lot was in a similar position, given the opportunity of living where he wanted; and he wrongly chose the Sodom area, and spiritually suffered for it. Jeremiah would’ve immediately been on his guard, in case this offer of living where he liked could lead him to wrong choices. The more familiar we are with Scripture and the more we reflect upon and personalize it, the easier it will be for us to see our situations as being in essence what others were in, and the clearer the decisions will become.

40:6 Jeremiah was popular with the Babylonians because he had repeatedly urged Judah to surrender to them and predicted the Babylonian victory. So he was offered a nice retirement package in the opulence of Babylon, amongst his fellow Jews, whom God had predicted would be the ones who would repent, rather than those very poor few who remained in the land. Jeremiah’s chose to remain in unstable Judah, which would’ve suffered all the practical and economic problems associated with anarchy, marauding gangs and a land destroyed by a lengthy military campaign; and he also chose to remain among the materially poor and spiritually weakest. They wouldn’t have been very nice company. The first wave of Jews taken captive to Babylon included faithful Daniel and his friends, Ezekiel and other prophets. But Jeremiah chose the hardest way, to stay with the weakest and poorest; he must’ve been so spiritually lonely. In various contexts we also have these choices, and if we are truly motivated by the love of Christ, we will seek the higher level choices as Jeremiah did.

40:9 *Don’t be afraid to serve the Chaldeans*- Gedaliah is alluding to Jeremiah’s words of 27:8,11,12, where he had urged Judah to recognize their sins and the need for punishment of them, and therefore serve the Chaldeans. Because they didn’t do this, destruction came. But even afterwards, it seems Gedaliah was still urging the people to accept this principle.

40:10-15 The positive situation described here, both materially and spiritually, was perhaps an outcome of the people being willing to obey Jeremiah’s earlier appeal to serve the Babylonians (see on :9). It would seem from 41:5 that the destroyed temple was at least partially operating; and as many as 80 men had cut themselves in repentance and a fervent desire for God to hear their prayers, and were bringing sacrifice to Him. The king’s daughters were allowed to remain in Mizpah, and some of the “greatest” amongst the Jews also remained in the land (42:1). This situation is never predicted by Jeremiah; all the prophecies suggest a total destruction of the people and the severing of God’s relationship with the land. But in wrath God remembered mercy; what we see here is grace indeed. And yet, once again, the situation didn’t last because of human failure- in this case, Ishmael’s evil explained in chapter 41, and Gedaliah’s unwisdom in :16.

41:1 To eat bread together was a sign of fellowship and mutual acceptance. The breaking of bread service is therefore designed as a comfort to us of the Lord’s acceptance of us. He is willing to do this any time with us.

41:5 See on 40:10-15.

42:4 *I will keep nothing back from you*- Paul uses the very same phrase from the LXX in Act 20:20 in the same context; of declaring to God’s people what He has revealed to him. Many of the allusions made by Bible characters to the words of other Bible characters may not have been conscious; but they were so filled with God’s word that they came out with those phrases which they had in their hearts as a result of their continual reflection upon God’s word. This is how the Bible can become a living word for us; in that we find ourselves talking even to ourselves, in our deepest self-talk, in the terms and phrases we encounter in the Bible (Eph. 5:19). This is the essence of spiritual mindedness, which is what Christianity is all about.

42:6 *We will obey*- Whilst their attitude is great on paper, chapter 43 explains that they simply rejected the answer they received. At this point, they were approaching God and seeking guidance from His word with their minds already made up as to what they wanted the answer to be. This is the attitude which robs so much prayer and Bible reading of its value- people can do these things in the hope they will be confirmed in their own views and wishes, and if they aren’t confirmed in them, they just continue in them anyway. Prayer and Bible study must be done with a true openness of mind and willingness to be directed by them, even into paths and choices we strongly don’t wish to make.

*God to whom we send you*- Prayer was envisaged by them as a going to God, a journey into His presence. Although we are in His presence all the time, this doesn’t take away the special entry into God’s personal presence which is what prayer is all about.

43:2 See on 42:6. The way out of finding that God’s word is telling us something we don’t want to hear is to claim that actually, that part isn’t inspired. The problem with rejecting parts of God’s word- the inconvenient bits- is that we then have no mechanism with which to decide which parts to accept and which not to; the process becomes subjective to the point that God’s word is no longer His but effectively our own. And it’s pride which is at the root of refusing to accept God’s word as inspired- for “all the proud men” refused to accept Jeremiah’s word as inspired.

43:5 *The remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven*- It seems that during the short period of peace immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem (see on 40:10-15), some of the Jews who had fled over Judah’s border into neighbouring countries started to return. This was becoming a foretaste of the prophesied restoration and return which was to happen after 70 years; but their trust in Egypt and lack of faith in Jeremiah’s prophetic word meant that this possible scenario didn’t come true. We too by grace have many possible scenarios open to us, but our unbelief and desire to follow our gut feelings lead us not to fulfil them.

43:8 *Jeremiah in Tahpanhes*- It’s incredible that Jeremiah went there with them, despite having had his prophetic words specifically ignored, and being slandered as actually not a true prophet of Yahweh. But this was his level of identity with God’s people, weak as they were. After reading this verse, the spiritual weakness of others in the family of God should never again make us think that we want nothing to do with them. We need to stick with them as Jeremiah did.

44:3 Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him along with other gods (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. The demand is for total dedication.

44:14 *For none shall return save such as shall escape*- God’s grace is amazing here. He had promised total destruction of Judah; but some survived. He had told Jeremiah that He wouldn’t respond to Jeremiah’s prayers for the people (7:16; 11:14). Yet Jeremiah had prayed for this remnant of the people, and God had responded (42:6). The people had solemnly promised to do whatever God said in response. He told them not to go to Egypt. They went anyway. God said they would be destroyed there “so that none... shall be left to return”. And now He hints at the possibility that some would still return to Judah from Egypt. He so seeks relationship with His people. See on :28.

44:18 *Were well, and saw no evil*- Their motivation was simply to have a situation where they would experience good and not “evil”, in the sense of disaster. Yet they had claimed that they would accept God’s word whether it meant good or evil for them (42:6). However, their agenda was clearly that they wanted good in this life, right now; rather than accepting evil now as a preparation for God’s future Kingdom. The prosperity Gospel has likewise totally misunderstood this; through much tribulation in this life we shall come to enter God’s Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

44:19 There is fair emphasis on the role the women played in the decision to worship “the queen of the sky”. Perhaps the women were attracted by the idea of a female deity and cast off their faith in Yahweh because of that attraction. People can be abused and discriminated against, just as women were at that time, and yet allow this to lead them into rejecting the true God because they think some other religious system gives value to the abused and glorifies them; when in fact it is Yahweh alone who can glorify anything and ultimately right any wrong.

44:28 Having said that all the Jews in Egypt would be destroyed (:27), there is still going to be a tiny remnant, by God’s grace. See on :14.

45:5 The command not to see great material things for himself was given to Baruch in the context of the fact that the entire nation of Judah was about to be taken over and destroyed by Babylon. Likewise James 5:3 comments upon the absurdity of heaping up treasures in the last days. If Jesus is about to return and establish His Kingdom here, then amassing wealth in this present order of things which is so soon to be destroyed is bizarre. To live *as if* the day of Christ’s return is upon us appears to have been an expectation of the early Christians. It is not to say that we actually *know* that day shall be hear imminently; rather are we to live *as if* it will be.

46:2 The disobedient Jews had fled to Egypt because they thought there would be support and stability there from the Babylonians. Here God prophesies that the Egyptian army would be destroyed and wouldn’t be a strength to the Jews. Egypt so often becomes a symbol of human strength which God’s people are tempted to trust in rather than in Him. His requirements are often counter-instinctive to obey; to remain in the ruins of Judah under Babylonian occupation was in fact the way to peace; but Egypt always looks the logical, more attractive choice.

46:5 *Why have I seen it?*- Jeremiah like us at times was weary at having to teach bad news to sinners, and the loss of life because of human pride.

46:9 The reference to “mighty ones” here and in :5 is an allusion to the Hebrew word *elohim*, which also means “mighty ones” or ‘the one great mighty one’, and is often applied to God and His armies of Angels. The mighty ones of Egypt and her allies were what Judah preferred to trust in, rather than in the mighty ones of Israel’s God. Hence God calls Himself by His title “Yahweh of Armies” in :18. His was the true army, not human armies. Day by day and at times hour by hour, we have this same choice- between trust in God’s might or human might. Biblical history is recorded so that we might make the right choice.

46:27 *None shall make him afraid*- This was how it would be at the time of the restored Kingdom of God; and yet Judah are then told that therefore right now in this life “Don’t you be afraid” (:28). They were to live now the kind of life they would eternally live in the Kingdom; and we too are asked to live the Kingdom life now. In this sense as Jesus often promised, we who believe in Him “have eternal life” right now (1 Jn. 5:13); not in that we will never die in this life, but in the sense that we can begin to live now the kind of life we will eternally live in the future Kingdom.

47:1 The Philistines were another group of people with whom Judah were tempted to trust upon against the Babylonians; but here their destruction is foretold. They should of course have realized from Biblical history that the Philistines were God’s enemies, and they ought to have driven them out of the land rather than think about making such alliances with them.

47:6 Again as in 46:5 we sense Jeremiah’s weariness at all the bloodshed and his desire for an end to come. We likely feel the same as we survey our world and the prophecies of its immediate future. The fact is, if Judah had been faithful, there would’ve been no Babylonian invasion, no destruction of the nations Judah wanted to make alliances with to stave it off rather than repenting.

48:6 It appears that God was even concerned saving some of Gentile Moab, who had been so aggressive to His beloved people. He gave them the same choice as He did to Judah- if they believed that Babylon really would take their land, then they should act appropriately. But just as leaders madly cling on to power, so people more than anything else want to retain their existing lifestyle and environment; we are all so conservative by nature, as Jesus recognized in His parable of Lk. 5:39. The old must continue at all costs, we think; whereas God’s word demands of us a counter-instinctive and radical change. This theme continues in :11, where we read of Moab as wine which has settled for too long.

48:9 It really was God’s will that even Moab be obedient; or perhaps this was Jeremiah’s interjection, as he too wished that Moab would flee their land and thereby escape death at the hand of the Babylonians. There was no gloating over the fact that Israel’s historical enemy was also to suffer, just as believers shouldn’t get caught up in feelings of national aggression against another race; rather did God and Jeremiah reveal a true perception of the value of the human person, and therefore a desire that they should repent.

48:13 The intended purpose of the judgment upon Moab was so that they would quit their allegiance to Chemosh their god. In those days, a people couldn’t exist without a national god, and in any case, there is within all humans a basic desire to worship at least something. The implication seems to be that if they quit Chemosh, then they would adopt Yahweh as their national God.

48:31 *Therefore will I wail for Moab*- Moab was to weep for her own destruction (:20), but Jeremiah was so identified with them that he felt their future pain and desolation, and wept with them ahead of time. This was how sure Jeremiah was that these prophetic words he preached would come true. He didn’t just relay them to the world as a duty, as merely a messenger. He identified with his audience and felt for them. This is our pattern in preaching. We must ask whether we have a heart that bleeds for this world, whether we have ever wept tears for the people we preach to and for the world around us which is fast heading to destruction.

48:36 *Therefore my heart sounds for Moab*- The preceding verses are clearly God Himself speaking. Both His and Jeremiah’s heart [see on :31] groaned for Moab, the continual enemy of God’s people. God weeps for the arrogant, for the condemned, for His enemies (:42). We who at times fear His judgment of us should remember this; ultimately His love and desire to save is very great, and we unlike Moab have openly shown in baptism, daily prayer and the life of faith that we do indeed want to be saved.

48:47 The latter day blessing of Moab will be when Christ returns and all Israel’s angry neighbours finally humble themselves and accept the God of Israel. So many prophecies of their judgment end with this prospect in view. The destruction of the wicked is but part of God’s greater plan to bring people from all nations to Him and the eternal blessing of His Kingdom on earth.

49:1 *Why then does Malcam possess Gad*- It was Ammon who had gone over their border to possess the land intended for the Israelite tribe of Gad; hence the reference to Israel repossessing their own land from Ammon in :2. But Malcam, the god of Ammon, is spoken of here as if it was Ammon (as in :3). A people are identified with the name of their god, in that those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115:8). Israel were unusual in that they had a national God, Yahweh, but they didn’t totally identify with Him because they also worshipped gods like Malcam whom the surrounding nations worshipped. By baptism into the Lord’s Name and becoming the spiritual people of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29) we are to be totally identified with our God.

49:9 *If thieves by night, wouldn’t they steal until they had enough?-* This recalls how Prov. 6:30 says that we don’t despise a thief who steals because he is hungry. Although all sin is sin, it seems that there are degrees of sin, hence the varying degrees of sacrifice required under the Law of Moses for different sins. God is particularly angry with those who revel in sin as Edom had done, for they as it were sinned for the pleasure of it rather than because human weakness pushed them into the sinful situation (not that sin in any form can be justified). We should bear this in mind when responding to others’ failures.

49:11 *Let your widows trust in Me*- As in all these prophecies there is an appeal for these enemies of God’s people to repent. The widows of the soldiers whom God had slain are asked to turn to God and trust Him; again we see that the ultimate intention of judgment is to bring people to God and finally bring about the establishment of His Kingdom.

49:16 God wanted to bring down the pride of Edom. They were not His people, they were one of many Gentile nations. Yet God observed their pride and how they trusted in their mountain strongholds. His colossal perception of the attitudes of every human being on earth is perhaps beyond our full appreciation. If He looks with such detail upon the hearts of those who don’t know Him, how much does He look upon us, and also knows the hearts of all those who intersect with us His children.

49:25 *How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy!*- This could be the stubborn denial of the king of Damascus. Yet Jerusalem is the city of praise that shall not be forsaken eternally, and which shall be the eternal joy of God’s people when it is declared the capital of the future Kingdom of God on earth (Ps. 9:14; 102:21; Is. 62:12; 65:18). So it seems that God and Jeremiah interject in the midst of these woeful prophecies of the destruction of Gentile cities like Damascus, to reflect that ultimately Jerusalem will not be destroyed like they shall be. This encourages us to see the predictions of Jerusalem or Zion’s eternal presence and joy as having a literal dimension to their fulfilment; the Jerusalem which we can locate on a map, view photographs of or visit shall indeed be the eternal capital city of God’s Kingdom on earth, in the same way as Christ shall reign eternally on David’s throne / place of kingship, which was in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:31-35).

49:28 *Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck*- The destruction of all these nations is prophesied as a warning to Judah not to make allegiance with them in the hope they would stave off the Babylonian invasion. The lesson is so repeated- that all human strength is not going to work out, the only way of escape from the consequences of sin is by listening to God’s prophetic word.

49:30 *Has conceived a purpose against you*- But :31 explains that God had commanded Nebuchadnezzar to attack these nations. God is therefore shown to be capable of putting thoughts and ideas in the minds of wicked Gentiles, even though they of their own freewill conceive the plans themselves. We’re unable to exactly understand this process nor the ethics of it all, but the fact is that it happens. The encouragement is that if God does this kind of thing to wicked people, He is likewise able to work upon the weak hearts of those of us who do love Him in weakness and who eagerly invite Him to put good rather than evil in our hearts because we feel so weak in our own mental strength.

50:2 *Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed*- Note how Babylon is so identified with her gods; see on 48:13; 49:1.

50:3 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 (compare :3 and :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 (1 Cor. 11:29,32).

50:4 God’s intention was that when Babylon fell, the exiles would repent and return to rebuild Zion and enter the new covenant (:5). Babylon fell, the new king, Cyrus of Persia, commanded them to return and rebuild the temple; but the Jews didn’t repent and therefore many of them remained in Babylon, where they had a good life. The fall of Babylon is spoken of in Revelation as happening at Christ’s return; the prophecy will be reapplied and fulfilled at that time. The return of the Jews to Israel over the last few generations is surely a preparation for this.

50:8 There was an urgency to flee from Babylon, even though at the time the Jews were prosperous there; there were Jews in leadership positions, as the Biblical record makes clear in Daniel; and archaeological research shows that the Jews were in senior business and administrative positions. But there was an urgency to flee from there and return to Judah and rebuild the Kingdom. The call to leave Babylon is interpreted in the New Testament as representing the call of the Gospel, to leave this present system of things at least mentally (Rev. 18:4). But will the new Israel respond better than historical Israel?

50:14 *She has sinned against Yahweh*- Gentile unbelievers are still counted as sinning against God. His sensitivity to sin must make it so hard to be God... perceiving and feeling the sin of every person amongst the billions of this world. We should be therefore the more sensitive to His sensitivity. This also means that He must be thrilled with the genuine efforts of His people to be righteous, as He observes so much rebellion against Him.

50:20 *The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none*- An encouragement to us as to the totality and depth of God’s ability to forgive.

50:29 *For she has been proud*- For all the millions of sins of Babylon, not least her idolatry, it is her pride which is seen as her main sin; for pride is the essence of all sin (see too :31,32,36).

50:33 *They refuse to let them go*- The Babylonians ‘refused’ to let Judah return in the same way as Egypt did under Pharaoh. However, there’s no hint that the Jews actually asked to return. Babylon ‘refused’ to respond to the Angels’ attempts to encourage Babylon to send the Jews back; this may be referred to in Dan. 10:13. From the viewpoint of a Jewish person in Babylon, all this Angelic activity was quite invisible. We too can think God is inactive when in fact He is working powerfully for us behind the scenes.

50:39 *It shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall it be lived in from generation to generation-* The fact Babylon has been rebuilt at times and didn’t cease to be inhabited after the Medes captured it and overthrew the Babylonian empire means that this prophecy must have a future fulfilment. It’s not impossible that literal Babylon may be rebuilt, and the latter-day equivalent of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires be re-established in the form of some superpower which will likewise persecute Israel and meet their final end at Christ’s return.

51:1 *A destroying wind*- The Hebrew *ruach* translated “wind” is also translated “spirit”; God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). The reference seems to be to a specific Angel who was given the task of destroying Babylon; rather like the Angel who slew the firstborn of Egypt and the faithless Israelites in the wilderness is called “the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:10). God gives His Angels specific tasks to perform, in the same way as He works with us and will work with us when we take over the Angels’ role in the future Kingdom on earth (Lk. 20:35,36; Heb. 2:5). We have even now been given specific work to do, and we should pray to perceive what that is (Eph. 2:10). Also note that the apparently ‘negative’ phenomena in human life, “evil” in the sense of destruction, come from God through His Angels designated to perform that work- there is no personal Satan figure who is out of God’s control and working against Him.

51:6 Quoted about us in Rev. 18:4; see on 50:8.

51:8 *Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed*- If God wanted to save even Babylon, how much more is He eager to save us who do believe in and love Him. After all the prophecies of destruction against Babylon, they could all have been averted if she had been taken the message of repentance by the Jews and had accepted it. But part of the problem was that the Jews were comfortable in Babylon [see on 50:8] and therefore they didn’t see she needed to repent too much, and they didn’t preach this to her. One of the reasons we don’t preach to this world is because we are too comfortable within it, as Judah was in Babylon.

51:9 *Her judgement... is lifted up even to Heaven* – But sins are described as rising up to Heaven (2 Chron. 28:9)- here the judgement for them is spoken of as also rising up to Heaven (same Hebrew words). Sin and judgment are therefore paralleled. Sin is its own judgment. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. In this sense, we know God’s judgments, and the coming day of judgment shouldn’t therefore be some totally unknown situation for us. For we have His judgments revealed ahead of time in His word.

51:12 *Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke*- The idea of God 'preparing' implies that there is therefore a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed- hence the statement here that He has planned *and done* as planned (see too 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; 37:26; Zech. 1:6; 8:14). This ‘gap’ is significant when we come to consider the idea of God’s ‘repentance’ or change of mind- stating something is going to happen, but then changing His mind because of human behaviour during the ‘time gap’ between the statement and its’ execution. How then are we to understand God’s capacity to know the future? All we can say is that God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time- with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Often we read of how God says He is planning evil and devising a plan against His enemies (18:11; 26:3; 49:20,30; 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). But having shared with us His plans through the prophets, He is open to being persuaded not to perform them- as we see in the case of Nineveh, and the intercessions of Moses. See on :29.

51:15,16 The implication is that the same Divine word which brought about creation (God spoke His word and it was done), and which still sustains it, is the same word of God which we meet in the prophets proclaiming destruction. The awesome power of God’s word as it is in our times in the Bible is the same creative power we see in the natural creation, and carries the same destructive power as has been witnessed throughout history in His destruction of wicked entities.

51:24 The destruction of Babylon was because of their destruction of the temple; but it took at least 70 years for this judgment to come, in the same way as it took nearly 40 years for Jerusalem to be destroyed for crucifying Christ. The generation who killed Him and that which destroyed the temple all died in their beds. The gap between the sin and the judgment coming was surely in order to give a chance for repentance, and for the subsequent generation to perceive the evil their fathers had done and repent of it. But this lack of repentance and disassociation was what caused such fearful judgment to finally come upon them. In the length of the ‘gap’ we see the passion of God for human repentance and for people to perceive the sin not only of themselves but of the societies in which they live.

51:29 *The plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand*- God states His plans but is open to change; in Babylon’s case, they remained or ‘stood’ because there was no repentance nor intercession for her; see on :12.

51:36 *I will plead your cause*- Judah is as it were the one who takes Babylon to the Divine court, with the complaint of :34,35. God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, *and* take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as our judge. Micah 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, the Lord stood up to plead as an advocate, and also He stood as the Judge to pronounce the verdict in favour of His people (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them (Mal. 3:5). In this mixture of metaphor we see how the judicial process is biased in our favour by the simple fact that God loves His people; hence Paul, having made the same observations with his use of legal terms, concludes that there is nobody who can condemn God’s people (Rom. 8:33,34). The events of our lives, all the abuses we suffer, are being considered by God right now in His court. He is both our advocate, the ultimate accurate witness to our sufferings, both of the facts and also our internal feelings, and is also the judge. His apparent silence isn’t that at all. The ongoing process of the court of Heaven should be our continual comfort.

51:39 *A perpetual sleep and not wake*- The ultimate punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which is unconsciousness, without any hope of a future resurrection. Eternal conscious torment of the wicked isn’t taught in the Bible.

51:48 *The heavens and the earth*- Another example of where ‘heavens and earth’ refer to the people of Israel and aren’t to always be taken literally, especially when we read of their ‘destruction’.

51:61 The Babylonians had been kindly disposed to Jeremiah because he had prophesied their victory against Jerusalem and had urged Judah to surrender rather than fight Babylon; and they had offered him a comfortable retirement in Babylon after Jerusalem fell (40:4). Such a prophecy would’ve seemed the height of ingratitude towards them. The captive Jews had just arrived in Babylon; to pronounce the destruction of Babylon was the last thing they wanted to do, because they sought the favour of their captors. To speak out God’s word is so often counter-instinctive, awkward, embarrassing and difficult.

51:63,64 Babylon’s destruction is as a stone being cast into the sea (Jesus repeats this in Rev. 18:21). But Jesus also uses this very image to describe the judgment of those who offend one of His little ones (Mt. 18:6). To upset fragile believers by our rejection of them is to be as bad as proud, idolatrous Babylon who destroyed Yahweh’s temple and slew His people. And it will meet the same judgment. We should therefore be extra careful not to reject our fellow believers, especially the “little ones” whose faith is new or fragile. Three of the Gospel records feature this saying of Jesus (also Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2); it is so very important.

52:3 Zedekiah’s rebellion was of his own freewill, and God through Jeremiah had pleaded with him not to rebel but to surrender; yet in another sense, God confirmed Zedekiah in this stubbornness, because He wanted to express His anger against Judah. If we reject God’s word as Zedekiah did, then we will be confirmed in the way to destruction we wish to go.

52:8 See on 39:5.

52:27 If this includes Seraiah (:24), and this Seraiah is the same one as in 51:61, it may be that he died because he had in his heart decided that he would not relay God’s word nor obey the difficult preaching commission which he had been given (see on 51:61).