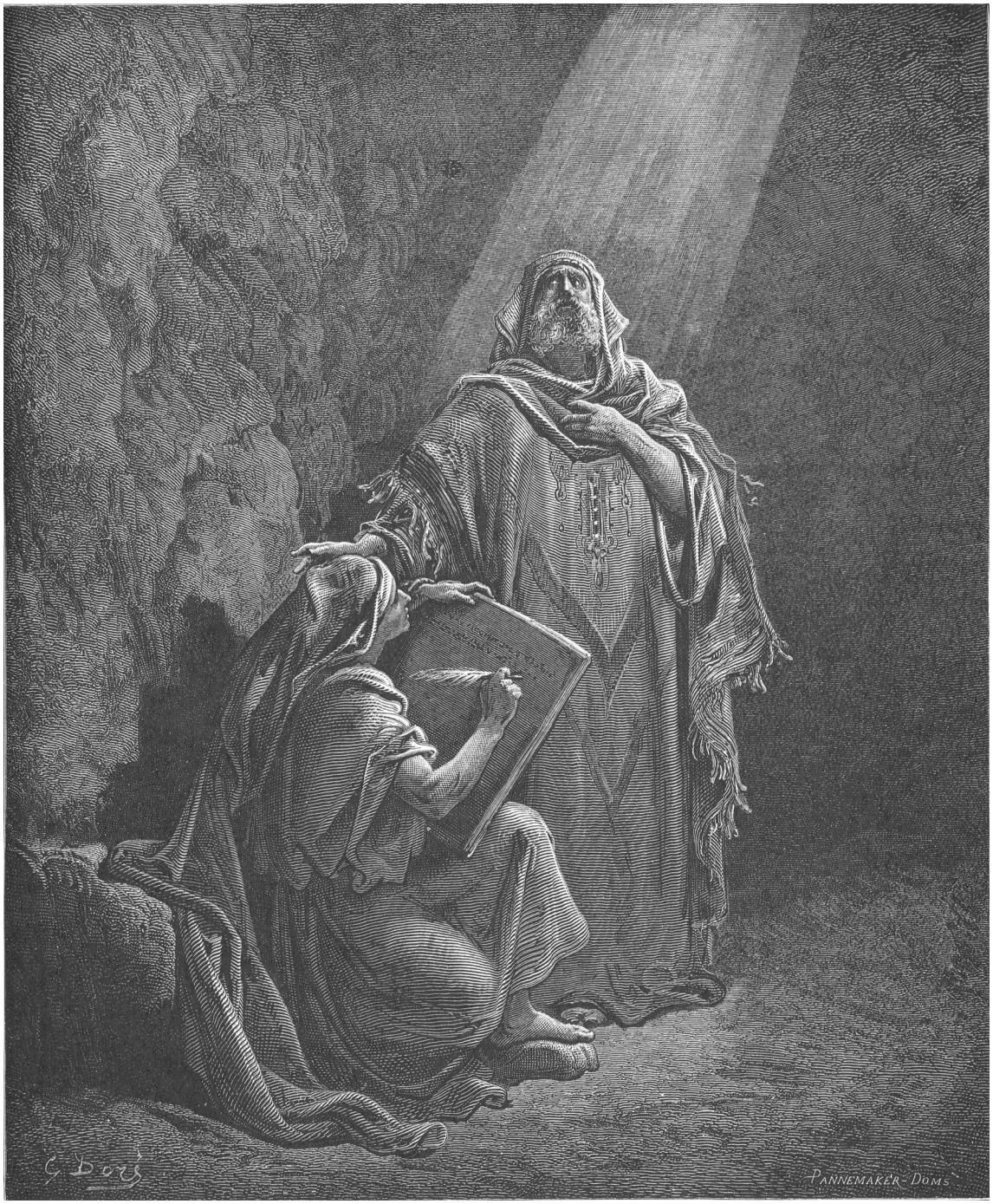


# JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS

***a Devotional Commentary by Nate Wilson***

*Written c. 1992, Revised 2025.*

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# INTRODUCTION:

Nate Wilson grew up in a Christian home, worshiping at Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and attending Briarwood Christian School from Kindergarten through High School. He then moved to the Chattanooga, Tennessee area, where he became a member of New City Fellowship Church, earned a Bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (Physics, Mathematics, Missions, and Music) from Covenant College, married the love of his life, and began full-time, faith-supported parachurch ministry. After these things – at 24 years old – he wrote this devotional journal.

Three decades later, the hand-written journal was re-discovered by Nate, who, in the meantime had earned a Master of Divinity degree at Sangre de Cristo Seminary in Westcliffe, Colorado and had begun a different career as pastor of Christ The Redeemer Church of Manhattan, Kansas. He was so encouraged by this journal – especially at seeing how God had answered the many prayers in it, that he transcribed it with only a light amount of editing, hoping that it would offer insight and encouragement to other Christians.

Special thanks is due to Nate's daughter Lillian for transcribing the first nine chapters. Credit for the woodcut on the cover goes to Gustav Doré, Font styles are Liberation Sans and Liberation Serif.

If you appreciate this commentary, check out the others by Nate Wilson:

- Leviticus: A Call to Holiness
- 1 Samuel: Lessons from the Life of Saul & Contemporaries
- 2 Samuel/1 Chronicles: Lessons from the life of David & Contemporaries
- Psalms (1-56): Worshiping God from a Fallen World
- Isaiah: A Call to Faith
- Ezekiel (devotional commentary)
- Jonah
- Micah
- Nahum
- Habakkuk
- Matthew: Introducing Jesus
- 1 Corinthians: A Call to Unity
- 2 Corinthians
- Philippians (co-authored)
- Paul's Letters To The Thessalonians (Devotional)
- Hebrews: Jesus Is Better
- James
- 1 & 2 Peter: A Message for Christians Everywhere
- 1 John: Confident Christianity
- 2 & 3 John: Love In Truth
- Jude: Step Up the Fight for the Faith

These commentaries can be found at www.NateWilsonFamily.net , Christ The Redeemer Church Office, 2488 Woodside Ln, Manhattan, KS 66503, or the Sangre de Cristo Seminary Library, 6160 County Rd. 130, Westcliffe, CO 81252

# Chapter 1

Jeremiah began his prophecies about 627 BC, shortly before King Josiah found the book of the law. He was taken into Exile by the Babylonians but was not taken into Babylon himself. He did have to flee into Egypt when the folks in Judah wouldn't put up with his prophecies anymore. He apparently died in Egypt around 575 BC, still prophesying against the worship of false gods.

Jeremiah was of the priestly line, living in a town set aside for priests (Josh. 21:18) near Bethlehem. He's a "youth" when God calls him directly to prophetic ministry. God had predestined him to this before Jeremiah's parents had conceived him!

How comforting this is to me, for I am also but a youth: Our age doesn't matter if we go everywhere God commands us and speak the words He commands us to speak! That is the important thing.

*O God, help me to be sensitive to you that I may know where you want me to go and what you want me to say. And, Lord, give me an obedient heart that seeks, at all cost, to please you that I may go where You want and say what You want me to say.*

"DO NOT BE AFRAID" – How often God says this to His servants! We should never be controlled by a fear of what men will do to us; the only legitimate fear is the fear of God. God will deliver us from every one of man's terrors.

*O God please put Your words in my mouth! Let me not be full of human opinions and words and babble, but be an oracle of you.*

God is above all the nations, ruling in ultimate sovereignty. His word is authoritative above any man's words. We must heed God's words above any man's, and we must remember that if we speak God's words, they are authoritative over any contradictory man's words!

Notice four words of destruction in the last half of the verse: Some serious "negative reinforcement" is on God's mind, but that's not the end of the plan! The end result is building and planting, words of renewal and blessing.

v.11-12 The word for almond, שָׁקֵד (*shaqeyd*), is very close to the word for watching over, שָׁקַד (*shaqad*). So God has given Jeremiah a visual image to remind him of His vigilant watch, care, and the surety of the fulfillment of the prophecies.

Whenever Jeremiah saw an almond tree, he would remember God's שׁקד! That's awesome!

*I praise You for your creativity in doing this, and for how You use language to your glory. I praise you that Your word will always come true and that You are always watching over your people!*

Sounds like the rest of the chapter is prophesying that people will come from the north (as indeed the Chaldean army soon thereafter did march from Babylon north, then west, then south around the fertile crescent, approaching Israel from the north), overrun Israel, and sweep down through Judah, just as a cauldron of hot oil would. Notice that it is God who "calls" them to do this and that not even this ungodly nation will be able to go against His call – "they will come." Why? Because His people in Israel have "forsaken [Him] and turned to worship other gods"!

What gods do we worship in my post-Christian culture? Basically we worship ourselves and do everything to please ourselves – just as heinous to God as sacrificing babies to Moloch... Do we not deserve the same judgment? Does not the Christian community in this culture feel the same tug to worship self? Oh what a struggle it is for me!

God speaks to Jeremiah as though he were asleep in bed, "Get up and get dressed!" (or, in King James English "Gird up thy loins and arise!")

What an awesome task set before Jeremiah! To tell everybody that they have forsaken God – and are wickedly worshiping false gods – and that God's punishment is coming to destroy Israel from the North. But Jeremiah can't be dismayed because: 1) God will dismay him if he gives up, and 2) God will strengthen him as he is faithful – strong as a castle or an iron pillar. God will deliver Jeremiah when the people fight against him.

Wow, what a calling! How would you go about it? I guess you'd just have to use all the media you can – write, sing, speak, act, disciple – anything to get the message out. I feel some similarity of calling to speak out against the selfishness of the Church and to point the Church toward missions and family and spiritual maturity – values that seem to be lost in the worship of self.

*O God, I get dismayed at my task. Please give me courage and abandon of myself that I may not be dismayed and that You may strengthen me like walls of bronze and use me effectively to spread this message which You've given me.*

# Chapter 2

What a convicting chapter! I couldn't write anything the first day I read this – it kinda left me speechless. This message was to be spoken aloud in Jerusalem that the people of that city might hear it.

"As a bride you loved me" – our relationship with God is like that of wife to husband. We are inseparably bonded; we are submissive to Him; we seek to please Him; He loves us and takes care of us; He has even written us "love notes" in the Bible!

There are 4 sections to this chapter, each with a short preface ("P" about 3 verses) ending with "declares the Lord" and a body ("B" twice as long as the preface) ending with "declares the Lord."

It's almost humorous to hear God's sarcasm:

- I B – "What fault did you find with me...?"
- II P – "Has a nation ever changed its gods the way you have? And their gods are not even gods at all!"
- II B – "They've forsaken me, the spring of living water for broken cisterns that cannot hold water… Why do you act as if you were born as slaves?"
- III P – "You tore off your yoke (you were married to me)" ...as though being a bondservant to God was contemptible – in favor of bondage to other gods!
- III B – "You say to wood, 'You are my father,' and to stone, 'You gave me birth'"
- "Let [the gods you made for yourselves] come, if they can save you when you are in trouble!"
- IV B – "Have I been a desert to Israel?"

*O God, may this never be said of me that I strayed from You! Please hold me close and let me never be unfaithful to You!*

The sad truth is in the stupidity of forsaking God! Sure, other options are more attractive to our fleshly nature, but you can't get around the simple truth that there is no god but God, and He is good to His people. There is no fault in Him; there is no other god; there is no other source of living water; there is no yoke so light as bondage to Him; there is no god who will ever come to your aid but Him; and He provides us with good things – all we <u>need</u>.

*O God, You are awesome. Why then do we so quickly run to forsake You? When we sin, we break Your heart (as it should break the heart of any loving husband);*

*we get ourselves into trouble; we come under Your judgment; and we are miserable for it.*

The appalling truth is that we can identify with Israel who wanted to lie under every spreading tree (likely the sexual orgies to worship Asherah – they were held on hills around a tree or "Asherah pole"). We can identify with that because our culture is saturated with lust and we easily become like the she-camel – running around in heat, having no desire for faithfulness, just seeking to satisfy herself and seeking mates. "Who can restrain her?" "Does a widow forget her jewelry or a bride her wedding ornaments? Yet my people have forsaken Me..."

*O God, why do we have such senselessly rebellious hearts? Why are we such fools for sin? O Father, please wean me of my sinful ways. Let my heart never grow so hard that it will not at least fall before You in repentance for sin. Never let me forsake You. You are my first Love; let me never forget my wedding to you. Dear Lord, help me to be infatuated with You and seeking out Your desires and seeking to please You!*

# Chapter 3

What kind of lovers do we have now? We are, of course, lovers of ourselves. We also love to depend on the federal government and to immerse ourselves in media and movies. We are lovers of money and luxuries, and we have many friends. How do we forsake all these lovers and turn to God? It is scary that my own culture is in worse wickedness than the culture to which Jeremiah spoke! Is there any sin which can not be found in my country? Is there any sin which can not be found glorified by some media in my country? Like faithless Israel, my country is also defiled with prostitution and wickedness.

*O God, have mercy!*

It is interesting that God gives bad weather when Israel is sinful; this is a way of His judgment. As long as there is repentance for sin, there is hope, but when we reach the point where we are not embarrassed by our sin and do not turn to God afterwards begging His forgiveness, confessing our sin, and desiring to turn away from that rebellion, then God's judgment is inevitable.

*O God, I beg You, never let my heart be so hardened. Purify my life that the measure of sin and rebellion may decrease as I grow older.*

When you see someone who is truly evil and see their downfall, you tend not to want to be like them. Sexual immorality may be appealing, but when you see a really sexual immoral person and see the pain in their face and understand their emptiness and helplessness and watch them die of sexually-transmitted disease, it should make you want to strive for sexual purity and holiness.

Judah saw Israel (the Northern half) fall first into idolatry and then get carried away by the Assyrians. But rather than turn to God, Judah plunged into idolatry too! The heart that knows right from wrong and still chooses wrong, in full knowledge of its consequences, is indeed worse than the one that sins without realizing the full impact of it.

*O God, how must it feel to be our "husband," when we are unfaithful? What amazing love You have for us – more than I could ever have for my own wife. And what incredible pain and hurt and longing You have when we are unfaithful! It overwhelms me to think of it. It is all there in Your mind (just as it would be in my imagination if – God forbid – my wife were to leave me) how You would like us to repent and what You would do if we did (v. 14 – 4:2). What a glorious picture of repentance; Oh that my own people would repent like this too!*

How lightly, on the other hand do we tend to take sin! How long do we spend in confession of sin and mourning over our wickedness? How disgraced and ashamed are we at our own sin? When was the last time that I confessed the sins – not only of myself, but also those – of my ancestors and of my nation? This has much Biblical precedent (for example, Daniel 9).

# Chapter 4

*Oh how I long for the day when my sin will be utterly purged from me – when this mortal flesh will be stripped from me and I shall be with you, dear Jesus! How I long to put away forever detestable sins. Lord, I want to be consumed with You.*

*(It occurs to me that, although the Bible is your Holy Word revealed to us, sometimes we become over-focused on this physical book and are not quite as focused on You Yourself. O God, give me a living, real relationship with You!)*

Jeremiah is talking about world evangelization and the Abrahamic covenant too!! If God's people lived as they should, then God would bless the nations! How awful the opposite is; when God's people are no different than those who are not God's people (or when people who are not God's people become associated with His Name deceptively).

What a "bad rap" the Church has in my culture! Seems like every non-Christian to whom I've presented the Gospel has argued that he doesn't want anything to do with Christianity because of all the hypocrisy and problems he's seen in the church. Horror and shame, O church! If we truly loved God with the entirety of our hearts and truly loved other people, if we were more concerned to obey God and deny our fleshly lusts, if we were more concerned to build up our families in godliness, to befriend the physically needy, and teach godliness to the spiritually needy, what a reputation the church would have! Perhaps then it would be as in Solomon's day when kings from nations all around clamored to know about the True and Living God from the lips of His people.

*O Lord, will this happen? I fear that You will have to bring great persecution to your church before your Name is separated from all those who hold it falsely.*

v.3 What does it mean to "break up fallow ground"? It seems to refer to the practice of harrowing or tilling up soil before planting seeds in it. Perhaps this is a metaphor for preparing to do something new or returning to something they had forsaken for a time.

When God says not to "sow any thorns," does He mean the same sort of thing as He did in Jesus' Parable of the Sower? God's word getting choked by the cares of this world? Whatever it means, I think the metaphor of the thorns certainly has to do with the evil, choking, faithless, lacerating, entangling things of the world. We are to have nothing to do with ungodliness. But that's not a welcome statement in

my culture where Christians seem to be trying to outdo each other in worldliness, all the while spouting platitudes about "transforming culture."

Circumcision identified a family with God's people, the Jews. It was a sign of God's covenant to Abraham. It involved a cutting away of the flesh and an irrevocable commitment to God.

*O Lord, my heart has been circumcised; let it always be so. I identify with Your people, the church, even though I have had some frustrations with the fellowship in which I am a member. I have the seal of your spiritual covenant through baptism. I am desirous to cut away the things of the flesh and have, by Your grace and power already done some of it. I am a Christian; I have made that irrevocable commitment. O God, let me live, as my church membership vow put it, "as becomes a follower" of You. Preserve me from the evil, sinful patterns of my world and preserve my family that we may all honor You!*

God makes the links clear between His people's sin (v.1), His judgment (v.2), and the Assyrian/ Babylonian invasion and captivity (v. 3):

- SIN
  - "because of the evil you have done,"
  - "Your own conduct and actions have brought this upon you"
  - "My people are fools, they don't know Me – senseless children without understanding – skilled in doing evil; Not knowing how to do good (vs. 21-22)...
  - "How long will you harbor evil thoughts?" (v. 14) Even our sinful thoughts anger God! (v.28)
- Judgment
  - "because I have spoken and will not relent; I have decided... this is your punishment" (v.18),
  - "because she has rebelled against me" (v.17)...
  - "Now I promise my judgments against thee" (v.12)...
  - "My wrath will break out and burn" (v.4)
- Punishment
  - "I am bringing disaster through the North" (v.6)
  - "...fierce anger of the Lord against us" (v.8)
  - "...though I will not destroy it completely" (v.27)

This coming attack that the invading nation is about to perform is clearly not just the whim of an aspiring military man in the Babylonian army; this is all being organized by the Lord of Hosts! God is the One behind every war that has ever been fought! Perhaps that is overstating it, but what greater incentive is there to repent and fear God than war? How much more clear can He be in this passage?

God must punish sin or He would be unjust. When men die in war and go to hell; it is no more than they deserve; it is not an unjust thing for God to send people to hell.

And yet the whole point is that some might repent! Did you miss it?

- "Break up your fallow ground – circumcise your hearts" (v.14)
- "O Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved"
- It is also in the very message: the fact that God would warn His people through Jeremiah's message proves that He really does care for His people and long for them to repent, even at that late hour.

*O God, You are indeed great and just, yet full of compassion. Who can understand? How is it that You loved me enough to die for me when I rightly deserved to die and be cast away from Your grace eternally myself! Oh, hold me back from following after the wicked ways of my world! Please preserve my family in the disaster which is surely due to come upon my own nation. Please give me a compassion for the souls of men, even as Jeremiah had to beg men to come to repentance, before Your wrath falls upon them for their wickedness.*

And yet, Jeremiah's message fell upon deaf ears. Rather than turning to the One True and Living God who desires all men to be saved, they turned to their own devices to save them from the wrath of God manifested in the invading Chaldeans: The women put on fine clothes and makeup (funny how similar v.30 sounds to our worldly modern day women – they are still doing the same thing thousands of years later!) in the hopes that the Chaldean soldiers will take them as wives instead of killing them.

*O God, You are the only one who can save; let me always look to You for my safety, fellowship, and sustenance.*

# Chapter 5

*O God, I deserve Your fierce judgment against my rebellious heart... my nation even more so, just like Jerusalem of old:*

- *v.1 Justice is not done; truth is not sought – at best it is relativized.*
- *v.2 Your Name is used, but it is meaningless.*
- *v.3 You have judged my Nation with plagues, death, taxes, loss of freedom, etc, and it does not seem to bother us! Rebellion against You and Your ways is rampant and bold. How ingrained and unmitigated is my <u>own</u> rebellion!*
- *v.4 The poor that I have seen in my city are not half as bad as the corrupt, evil, godless men in places of power in my country.*
- *v.5 Unbelievers describe obedience to God as "bondage"! It is true; Christians are bond-servants of Jehovah, yet what a delightful bondage it is compared to the alternative of bondage to sin! O God, may I daily – yea hourly – consciously submit myself to bondage to You and Your law. (Matt. 11:29-30)*
- Interesting also is the theme of accountability to knowledge: judgment is first pronounced on the rulers who knew the law before it is pronounced against the ignorant poor!
- v.7 "Why should I pardon you for this?"
  - The second generation has forsaken God, and God holds their PARENTS responsible for this! What a responsibility we parents have to train our children in godliness!
  - That rebellious generation follows "non-gods" (I like that way of translating **לא אלחים**), and, when they are adjured to be righteous, they simply sin all-the-more.
  - Special attention is given to sexual sins: adultery, going to the houses of harlots, lustfulness, coveting their neighbor's wives. The more decadent a society, the more depraved its sexual sins, and my society's sexual sins are abominable.
  - *O God, we do deserve your judgment – Oh that we might turn away from these sins and see Your mercy!*
- vs.12 and 18 – God does not destroy <u>completely</u>; He is gracious and allows His righteous ones to remain.

More accusations;

- v.11 Deviousness with God... unfaithful and trying to cover up.
- v.12 Thinking that God will not judge their sins! (Ha!)
- vs.13 & 31 Prophets prophesy falsely – God's words are not in what they say – (Does this not sound like some modern media?)

- v.14 Jeremiah's words will seal the doom of those who rebel against God, but God is merciful, even to Jeremiah:
  - Israel had the Law and should have known they were doing wrong.
  - After Jeremiah will come the punishment – the Babylonian invasion! Then comes the captivity that is a punishment for worshiping other gods.
  - It is a <u>fool</u> who does not see the spiritual reality beyond the temporal sphere of what we see and hear, yet how many fools there are in my land! It seems that even many "Christians" nowadays make the things they see and hear with their fleshly senses preeminent. But the true and final reality is <u>spiritual</u> – God, His word (and obedience to it), and repentance and faith. Why do we not "tremble before [the] face" of Almighty God?
  - *O Lord, let me fear You as I should. How I <u>should</u> tremble with fear when I even contemplate rebellion to Your laws, considering Your omnipresence and Your hatred of sin! Not only do You have the authority to cast me into hell for my sin (vs. 24-25), You can also judge me in this earthly life by not providing for me! I fear You, Lord!*
- *vs. 26-28 O Lord, there are men in my country even as You described in these verses – evil men of great power, of whom I was just this morning being afraid of. I am afraid of the consequences of not buckling to their ways. Please give me wisdom in what to do regarding the hospital which has committed fraud against me, or my government which has broken its constitutional covenant and defrauded its people in so many ways.*
- v. 28 Pretending to be just won't fool God. They "plead the case of the orphan" – but not to <u>win</u> it!
- v.31 And look at this! The priests who are supposed to obey God closely have taken leadership into their own hands and have started doing their own thing, without regard to God. And this is what mankind in our sinful state loves.

*O God, I am devastated in spirit! Is there any hope for my country? Do we not face the same coming judgment as Israel did back then? How will I live in the midst of an increasingly corrupt nation? How will I live through the judgment which surely will come upon us?*

*Is there hope for my <u>own</u> rebellious and sinful heart? O God I believe there is hope through faith in Jesus Christ and repentance from sin, but how can I repent from sin when I cannot live a perfect life? (O God, let me rear my children to fear You!) You may spare me and my family the judgment due my nation, but we will surely undergo persecution from our nation until Your judgment falls. Please give us a great fear of You, an unshakable faith in You, and strength and grace to endure persecution. Dear God, please let me and my family be faithful in obeying You, and use us to spread the knowledge of You to many new people and families of this world.*

# Chapter 6

The invasion is dwelt-on a bit more in this chapter; but the cause is once again made clear: oppression, evil, violence, and destruction are the deeds of the people of Jerusalem.

- They do not listen to God or heed His warnings. Rather than delighting in His law (as they should), they are embarrassed by it! Everyone "cuts off a profit" – unbridled capitalism where they are just out to make as much money for themselves as possible.
- They "deal falsely" – cheating and lying?
- Religious leaders have not dealt with the problems, but gloss over rebellion to God and its painful consequences. They are not ashamed or repentant when they sin.

Are those not charges which could be truthfully leveled at my nation? God, this is really scary! What awful judgment is pronounced: utter destruction and disgrace. It makes me shudder to read some of these things. When a people's heart is rebellious against You and bent on wickedness and opened up to demonic influence, what hope is there? They can no more become obedient than a chair can walk – except for the grace of God, Who is more than able to change a hardened heart to obey Him.

*O God, please soften my rebellious heart. It is heartening to know at least that I am ashamed when I sin. Let me find Your ways and walk in them and find rest for my soul!*

# Chapter 7

It would take a lot of pluck to stand at the entrance to the great temple and say what Jeremiah said! But God is past the point of tact because of the rebellion of His people.

vs. 5-7 God simply wants His people to love their neighbor, care for the needy, and serve God alone.

vs. 8-11 God rebukes His people for instead lying, stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, burning incense to Baal, and walking after other gods – clear violations of 6 of the 10 commandments!

How can we have the unmitigated gall to sin over and over again and keep coming back to our holy God?

v.12 What happened with Shiloh? Perhaps this refers to 1 Samuel 14, where God judged Israel (and especially Eli's two evil sons) for their wickedness by having the Philistines win the battle against them near Shiloh.

*God, Your Love is so consistent and faithful! Vs. 13 & 25 talk about You rising early every day to call us back to You – What wonderful love!*

vs. 13-16 But there comes a point when God will not tolerate any more rebellion. He had reached that point already with Ephraim (the northern Israelite Kingdom), and had given them over to the Assyrians. Now He has reached that point with Judah, and He tells Jeremiah not to bother trying to intercede for them.

How often do <u>we</u> intercede for our nation and for others? This book has been causing me do to so for my country, although I sometimes wonder if it is too late. Reading <u>Operation World</u> and <u>Global Prayer Digest</u> and missionary letters has helped me pray for other nations.

vs. 17-20 Can we begin to imagine what indignation God must have when we worship other Gods? How impertinent to do so before the ever-present face of the only true and living Lord who created all that there is! God has every right to be upset, for He is the rightful ruler of the universe.

vs. 21-28 God <u>has</u> been incredibly patient throughout the history of Israel. But each generation seems to get worse.

# Chapter 8

God's judgment is harsh, but appropriate. It gets kinda tiresome to hear the same message over and over again, how God will destroy Judah for their sins...

- Exhuming people's bones to lie on the ground under the light of the stars which the people once worshiped.
- They are apostate and will never turn back.
- They chose death. (Interesting that the ungodly are into killing and dying, although they may greatly fear dying themselves.)
- It is a travesty when leaders and teachers turn apostate. Apart from the wisdom of Jehovah, what wisdom is there?
- How awful to have your wife be given to another man!

I wonder why the passage about the priests etc. from chapter 6:13-13 is repeated in ch 8:10-12? Perhaps the repetition was to make people remember, or perhaps the messages were told to different audiences.

Horses and conquerors are coming from the North (where the tribe of Dan had settled), and the people will have to retreat to the fortified cities, but they will be captured and taken to a foreign land. Think of the desolation and bleakness the people will feel. Think of the pain God feels when His beloved people are forsaken.

"Is there a balm in Gilead?" Yes, there is a balm in Gilead; yes a healer is coming, Jeremiah. Wait a few centuries and you will see Him! His name is Jesus.

# Chapter 9

Verse one in the Hebrew text is tacked onto the end of chapter 8.
vs. 1-8 God focuses on sins of the tongue in this chapter, accusing Judah of unfaithfulness to God, treacherousness, lying, not being mighty for truth, running to evil/slander/deceit, and using words to hurt and take advantage of others.

v.9 Yes, God has every right to punish people – including us! – for these sins. Why is it so easy to follow the ways of the world in the sins of the tongue? How woefully common sarcasm, insults, spitefulness, and put-downs are in everyday speech. It has even become (God forbid) a category of humor! And how quickly the truth is forsaken by the tongues of people – starting with News broadcasters and going right down to the little children. I've seen in conversation that there are people who will accept any ridiculous lie over the truth because they refuse to know God and His ways (v.6).

v. 10 What is the proper response? Mourning. Jeremiah is really getting into this: Wishing his head were full of water that he could cry more, and weeping and wailing on the mountains for all to see. God is spurring this on, telling Jeremiah to send for professional mourners (vs. 17-20) who are paid to sit and weep and wail for your cause. (That would be an interesting new market for an enterprising businessman in my country!) This is to warn the rebellious about what they are going to experience: they will weep when God brings consequences upon them, so they had better start weeping now. And if they will mourn over their own sin and weep over their iniquity, turning away from it, perhaps God will forgive them once again.

vs. 12-16 Once again the judgment of God is described: the land will be burned, and all the men will be killed.

vs. 21-22 No one will inhabit the land which God had given them centuries ago BECAUSE the people have ceased to obey God – His voice and His law.

We must bow ourselves totally to the will of our God, such that we do not even seek to do what we want, but instead, what God wants. When you get an idea to do something, do you immediately discern whether it came from God by means of His Spirit and His Word? Are we immediately obedient to His will when it is revealed to us? We must be like a faithful dog who seeks only to please the master, being perfectly obedient to Him and giving Him great enjoyment, companionship, and usefulness in doing His task. Forget yourself.

Notice that God once again brings out the influence of a father's teaching of his son – God puts part of the blame of Israel's idolatry upon the fact that fathers did NOT train their children in His law, but rather taught them about other gods. *O God, let me not teach my son to honor any gods of my time – only You.*

V.21 speaks of a siege and of much death. God's judgment is very real and serious and awful.

v.23-end – Boasting is another sin of the tongue. *O God, let me be a humble man who lives out the belief that anything good I have has been given by You. If I pride myself in any earthly thing, it will utterly fail me. Let me glory in You and boast about how great You are! Yes, that is the heart of missions: to tell people about You and call them to obedience to You.*

# Chapter 10

These chapters have a similar pattern in which God exposes a sin for what it is (in comparison with His holiness) and then pronounces His judgment upon His people for their rebellion.

vs. 3-9 The particular sin God exposes in this chapter is that of idol worship. I really don't see why anybody would want to bow before a senseless idol, but perhaps that's because nobody in my culture does it anymore and because I've been reading the Bible all my life. But God is right (of course); it really is stupid to genuflect to a bit of metal and wood!

vs. 1-2 What a distinction there is between the world and the people of God! The world will always try to goad us to its ways. Their ways can seem so attractive too, but they are empty and they end in death. Worldlings are terrified at things we don't even consider, and they have great reason to fear, because they do not trust in the One who is sovereign over all things and who "works all things together for good." What the world pursues is vanity! It should be obvious to a Christian the vanity in shopping malls and materialism, the vanity of study and intellectualism, and the vanity in the indulgence of the senses (whether it be gluttony, lustfulness, adultery, video-watching, music listening, etc.). But, oh what meaning and purpose bless the believer!

Vs. 10-16 The idol of modern heathen is primarily the self, although many are worshiping Satan, Allah, or Hindu gods, and many others worship other men (such as government, academic, or entertainment leaders). And many worship nature. But of what account are these gods in comparison to Jehovah? Nothing can hold a candle to God! It is amusing to read the taunts of God directed at other gods. I find this one especially funny: "the gods who did not make heaven and earth." It's true!

Look at the praise Jeremiah gives to God! Why isn't our praise and worship with other Christians like this? I sometimes wonder at the triteness of many modern praise choruses. Oh that true worship might come about in the congregations of the saints today and members burst forth with prayers of praise like Jeremiah's!

Vs.17-18 Siege is once again threatened. (Is this a prophecy of what will come, or it is an exhortation to people in an already-besieged Jerusalem?) The exile is prophesied ("sling the people out of this land"). And mark God's purpose for the exile: "so that they will find me." If we are God's children and we stray from Him, He often gives us hardship and distress in order to make us turn back to Him. And

it works, too! Distress is an indication that we need to clean up our rebellious act and turn to God.

Vs. 19-20 Jeremiah suffered with his people. The grief of his people due to God's punishment was something he too had to bear, even though God does not hold him guilty personally. This reminds me of Habakkuk's words in ch. 3, v.16: "I must wait patiently for the day of distress, for the people to arise who will invade us." (NASB[1])

v.21 Woe to the land when religious leaders go awry! Take heed, all who aspire to spiritual teaching and authority. Seek the LORD!

v.22 Once again, the prophecy that the invading nation will come from the North and that Judah will be a desolate place for jackals to haunt. (I wonder why Jeremiah keeps talking about jackals?)

v.23 So much for Humanism!

vs. 24-25 Interesting point on anger. God's anger and judgment are linked. It is appropriate to invoke God's anger and judgment on wicked people. If we, God's people, were given what we deserve too, we would have to drink of the judgment of God's wrath for our own sin. But why is it that Jeremiah speaks to God as though to a man known for having a violent temper?

1 KJV differs significantly from the NASB and NIV on this verse.

# Chapter 11

Vs. 1-8 Being a child of God means subjecting yourself to a very simple covenant – and it is a wonderful one at that! Just be obedient to God and respect Him as your God, and He will bless you and use you to be a blessing to the world. That's really all there is to it! How beautiful!

*O my God, give me a heart totally dedicated to pleasing You! You are my Sovereign, and I want to be a faithful subject of Yours. O God, forgive my rebellion and give me a heart of flesh that is eager to please You!*

But woe to the one who does not keep the covenant! God took special pains to delineate curses in Leviticus 26:14-33 which would fall upon covenant-breakers. It won't be like they didn't know better.

*O God, You are so compassionate beyond our deserving! We very much deserve to be sent straight away from Your presence to hell for our rebellion, yet You "rise up early" and devote Yourself to warning us and giving us a second chance to turn back to You. How can it be? Your love is amazing!*

vs. 9-13 & 16-19 But Judah certainly tried God's patience and rightly deserved God's punishment. It's not like God was turning traitor on His own people.

v.14 The godly men in the Bible leave us a precedent to pray for the salvation of cities and peoples which have offended God and incurred God's wrath. (Witness Abraham's prayers for Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses' prayers for Israel, and the various other prophets' prayers.) Why is it so uncommon to find Christians praying for godless peoples during prayer meetings?

When God says not to pray for Judah, it seems He's saying, "Hey, don't waste your time; these people are too far gone. I am bound and determined to destroy them." (It seems that this is, nevertheless, an implicit acknowledgment of the persuasive effect which our prayers have upon God when we intercede on behalf of others.)

v.15 No matter how holy we've been or how much we've associated with God's people or how long one has been a Christian, our sin is just as awful whenever we disobey God. It is a serious thing when a Christian sins, and the frequency of our sin (as it is to some degree inevitable) should never mitigate our horror and grief over our sin. Jesus' forgiveness is not cheap; God forbid that we cheapen it by taking sin lightly.

*O God, let me always be convicted by the gravity of my sin against You! Let me never think that any breach of Your laws is OK or will be easily forgiven just because I've been a Christian for a while.*

vs. 9, 18, 23 Apparently some Anatothians were after Jeremiah with a death wish. God let Jeremiah know about it, so Jeremiah prayed for God to smite them, and God promised to honor that request. Jeremiah did not display the fearful response of Elijah when Elijah was told of Jezebel's death wish against him. Rather than running away, Jeremiah did the right thing: he cried out to God for help. It is within God's will to call down God's judgment upon evil men.

*God, let me cry out to You first and never follow my fleshly impulses when I need your help.*

# Chapter 12

Jeremiah, how can you question God's judgments? Yet it is such a question: If God is just, why do those who don't fear God prosper? God answers that judgment has already come and more and worse judgment is on its way.

v.3 There are times when I want to curse the wicked too, yet I'm afraid to curse them to their face for fear of their retaliation, and in case the curse does not come to pass.

We are like priests before God. The prayer of many Godly men in the Bible is, "How long?" Godly men identify with the suffering of the people and bring the matter before God as a mediator before Him for people. Jeremiah is giving God advice! He's advising God to slaughter certain men. How can it be that God listens to man's advice? Somehow it is true. (Remember Abraham asking God to change His mind about Sodom and Gomorrah? and Moses changing God's mind so He would not destroy Israel?) Yet, when we are privileged to sit at the council table of the Most High God, we speak the words that are in accordance with His will.

v.4 Jeremiah is sensitive to the distress of the natural elements caused by the evil men. The wicked feel free to wreak havoc on other people, plants, and animals because they think that God does not see! How different we would be if we did every action with the full knowledge that God is scrutinizing every thing we do. Nothing is hidden from – or ignored by – Him.

v.5 God responds: The present judgment may not have been a hardship for the evil men (who ran with the footmen and were still at peace), but God's judgment/punishment will intensify (quicken to the pace of horses and swell like the Jordan river) and then the wicked will not be secure or at peace anymore.

v.7 Does this mean that the evil men will face the judgment of treachery within their own families, or does it mean that the families of Judah are corrupt and that, in order to follow God, they should not heed their family members who call after them to forsake God?

vs. 7-9 Even in His anger and judgment, God still calls Judah the "beloved of my soul." What amazing love to persevere even we speak against God and are unfaithful and wild like a lion and contaminate ourselves and make ourselves ugly with sin like a speckled bird.

*God, I give You praise for Your great love which will persevere for your people (including me) for eternity.*

How is it that we (God's people) are the inheritance of God? God the Father gives people to God the Son as an inheritance (cf. Psalm 2:8). We are by right, the family property of our Lord.

*Dear God, let all my children be Your inheritance. I praise You Jesus that I am Yours!*

vs. 7-13 God will give Judah over to her enemies, will lay her desolate, and ravage her. Other nations will destroy her. Even the productivity of the land will be destroyed. It is all by God's hand – "the sword of the LORD." What terrible punishment. Yet the destruction God brings upon Judah makes God unhappy. It hurts God to hurt His beloved people. He hears the mourning and will bring judgment upon those whom He used to destroy His people.

v.11 "No one lays it to heart." Does this mean that Judah doesn't recognize the punishment as God's judgment and repent, or does it mean that the nations who destroy Judah do not realize the seriousness of what they are doing?

*Lord, let me never be so insensitive to You and Your people that I do not recognize Your hand and repent of evil or that I trample other people heartlessly in doing Your will.*

v.10 It is the shepherds who have done this destruction. Those in positions of authority/governorship – especially spiritual leadership find it so easy to cause destruction by slipping into godless ways. God holds leaders very much responsible for those under them.

*Oh God, let me be a good leader of my family and in my ministry. Let me not lead anyone astray!*

Vs. 14-17 Look at this; world missions in the Old Testament again! God is concerned for other nations – even those that destroyed His people! If the other nations follow God's law (which would mean learning from God's people) and call and swear by the LORD, the only true and living God, then God will make this gentile nation to be in the middle of God's people!

# Chapter 13

vs. 1-11 God tells Jeremiah to go buy some underwear and wear it, but not wash it. Hmmm. Then God tells him to travel 400 miles North to the Euphrates River and hide his underwear in the rocks. Can you imagine if you ran into him on that trip? Ask him why he left town. He'll tell you that God told him to bury his underwear at the Euphrates River. You'd remember that. You'd also think him loony!

Are there things which you know God wants you to do, yet you are afraid to do them because you think that people will think you're weird? Think of Jeremiah and obey.

Who knows how long Jeremiah spent traveling or how long he stayed up in Assyria by the Euphrates River. What do you suppose was going through his mind all that time? "Why would the Lord tell me to buy underwear and hide it all the way out here???"

I'm sure he saw a lot of things along the way – empty cities from which the Assyrians had captured the northern Israelites. Perhaps he even saw some of the Israelite captives in Assyria. This would have driven home the reality of God's judgment and the surety that his prophecies would come true for Judah.

How do you suppose he ate? Surely he didn't make money at his job as a prophet. He was a priest, so that entitled him to eat parts of the sacrifices and perhaps to take a share in monetary offerings at the temple. What did the other priests in Anathoth think of him? Did they give him money for the trip? Or did God feed Jeremiah like He fed Elijah at the brook?

At any rate, when God told him to get his underwear back, Jeremiah found it rotted and unwearable, like you'd imagine a rag buried at the dump.

On the long trip home, I'm sure people remembered Jeremiah, the crazy man who had buried his underwear at the River. They now saw him holding the rag in his hand, and I'm sure they asked what he was doing now. Who but God could have put together such an advertising scheme?! I'm sure Jeremiah then had plenty of chances to tell curious people that the underwear signified God's people: we are to be close to God in an intimate way, but when we "refuse to hear" God's words (not reading the Bible and not being taught by Godly people), and when we "walk after the stubbornness of our hearts" (just doing the hings we feel like doing instead of disciplining ourselves to do God's will and dying to self), we become like a dirty, hole-filled, easily-ripped, old pair of underwear which is good for nothing but the garbage.

*O God, perhaps I hear Your words, but how I walk after the stubbornness of my own heart! Please hep me die to myself and my sinful nature and discipline myself*

*to do Your will, so that I may be Your man – that I may make Your name praised by other people, and I would praise You and bring glory to You. Let it be so!*

vs. 12-14 God tells Jeremiah to proclaim this message: "Every skin will be filled with wine!" God tells Jeremiah that people are going to replay, "Hey, we already know that all the wine-skins will be filled!" (They kept their wine in animal skin bags, and those skins had a spout to pour from as the bag was squeezed.) Jeremiah is to tell them that just as they will fill all the skins with wine, so God will fill every last man in Judah with drunkenness – even the priests and kings who were not supposed to even drink wine so as not to impair their judgment in their important leadership roles. God does not like drunkenness. He tells us that it's fine to drink wine (and, by implication, alcoholic beverages in general) but that we must not have so much that we lose our reason and become drunk or dependent on it to fill a selfish desire. This is still a problem today. God still hates drunkenness (and that includes drug trips), and He promises to heartlessly destroy all of those who are drinkers and druggies.

*Lord, please let this problem never enter my family!*

v.15 Our pride keeps us from hearing.

*O God, I am so proud, and that has kept me so many times from hearing you and other people. Please give me a humble heart that listens carefully and understands, never assuming my thoughts more important.*

v.16 All God asks is for us to give glory to Him by living as though He is Who He says He is in the Bible and seeking to obey His commands in the Bible.

*Father, let me give glory to You, never seeking glory for myself, but always telling other people how awesome You are.*

If we forsake God, then He has the power to blind us and make us unable to know Him or comprehend His word. When we forsake God, He makes life miserable! But we can be so stubborn that we keep clinging to sin and don't care how miserable we are without God!

v.17 Notice that Jeremiah isn't giving pious condemnation against sinners. God still cares deeply for His people. He weeps when we are rebellious to Him. God cries when He has to mete out judgment to us. Part of the sting of God's punishment is but the salt from His own tears.

v.18 Humility is a consistent theme in scripture (1 Chron. 7:14, Prov. 6:3, 22:4, Matt. 18:4, Luke 14:11, James 4:10, 1 Peter 5:6). God calls us to humble ourselves before Him and also to be humble before His people (today His people are fellow-Christians).

vs. 18-21 & 24 The prophecy is made again of a nation that will come from the North, conquer Judah, and take them into exile - a prophecy which was perfectly fulfilled not long after.

It must have taken a lot of pluck to say these things! Nobody likes to be told of their sin or of God's judgment. O Jeremiah, how did you endure all the scoffing and angry reactions?

*Lord, make me fear You so much that it doesn't matter what anybody else says.*

Perhaps it helped that Jeremiah could see the clear connection between Judah's sin and the punishment they deserved. God makes this very clear in verses 22-23 and 25 - 27. What's left of His people can no more do good and forsake their evil ways than a leopard can change his spots or a black-skinned man can become white. God is dealing with people who have been incredibly unfaithful to Him and who have committed all kings of sexual sin too. (This should be a very convincing argument in favor of the doctrine of total depravity!) We are totally unable to please God and do what is right except when God changes our lives and enables us to do good.

*God, there are still areas in my life where I am rebellious to You. Please change these 12specific areas and enable me to do good!*

# Chapter 14

This chapter concerns a famine in Judah. It opens and closes with a prayer of Jeremiah to God to alleviate the drought, and God's response to the prayer is in the middle. Jeremiah prays, and God says, "Forget it, man, I'm punishing these people," but Jeremiah pours out the last prayer to change God's mind. The beginning of chapter 15 discloses that God is still not inclined to answer the request.

Jeremiah, why keep this up when God's mind is already made up? Well, I believe that Godly men somehow have clout with God, and God wants us to "influence" His decisions. But how can that be with a totally sovereign God Who has already charted all history and Who knows more than anybody? He knows more than we do about our situation, and He understands and identifies with our needs. He also empathizes with us when we make our request, but He is in no way obligated to fulfill our request because He may have a better plan in light of the things He knows about our situation that we don't know.

Perhaps it's like a merchant in the bartering system – the merchant begins by quoting an exorbitantly-high price. He doesn't expect the buyer to go for it, but it just starts the conversation going and gives the buyer a figure to work with. The buyer quotes a ridiculously-low price. Again, the buyer knows that the merchant won't sell for such a low price, but he is responding and letting the seller know he is interested and engaged. And thus they go back and forth until a fair price is agreed upon. This was what Jeremiah was used to doing in his culture in the marketplace, so perhaps this way of praying made sense to him moreso than it does to us. God starts the bargaining at too high a price; Jeremiah goes to the other extreme, and there seems to be closure at a middle ground towards the end of the next chapter.

But, in this way, Jeremiah is impressed with God's strong passion for justice and His just punishment for sin. In this way, Jeremiah is forced to intercede for his people. He is reminded to confess sin and beg for God's mercy. God uses this "prayer bartering" to make Jeremiah grow in the understanding of his role and to realize more of what God is like and to think through God's relationship to His people and His promises and to grow in his prayer life. Remember that God put Abraham (Gen. 18) and Moses (Ex. 32) through similar prayer-bartering experiences.

*Lord, I'm not sure how best to respond to this. I've never heard You speak to me Your intentions for my nation. I've never been through a prayer-barter, but I'm willing to, if it be Your will. I also realize my responsibility to pray and to bring cases before You in supplication. Lord, help me to pray for my people more diligently.*

Now, looking a little closer at the passage:

vs. 3-4 Why were people ashamed when they could not find water? I'd think they would be frustrated, angry, or devastated when they could not find water, but how did they connect it with something they should be ashamed of? Did they know it was punishment for sin? Did they feel shame because they couldn't provide for their families or because they hadn't worked hard enough to provide?

vs. 1-6 Notice how Jeremiah evokes God's compassion by describing the plight of the people – rulers, children, farmers – even the plight of nature (deer and wild donkeys)! It's entirely appropriate to describe the needs of God's creation in such a way that He will have more compassion!

vs. 7-9 Jeremiah also makes a logical case for his request to end the famine: "act for Your Name's sake." The way God treats His people is a reflection to the world on His own self – on His "name" as they would put it in Hebrew – His reputation. If God were harsh to His people, then that reputation would spread to the rest of the world and give God a bad rap. Jeremiah reminds God of this. He also brings up the fact that God is the only hope of His people and that He has saved them many times before. Therefore, to be consistent with His character and position, He should save them from the drought. Not only is God their hope, but also He is their own God. They have a covenant relationship: He dwells with them; He is not like a stranger who can choose to leave. He is committed to be with His people. He also has all the power and ability necessary to end this drought. See how Jeremiah builds his case? This is not a quick "Help, Lord" This is a carefully-reasoned case to turn the heart of Almighty God. Do we do this when we pray?

*Lord , let me remember to build a case when I am burdened to pray for a particular thing. Remind me of how each request is consistent with Your history and Your attributes.*

God responds with His reasons for this drought as a punishment of His people. It's because "they have loved to wander and have not restrained their feet."

*O God, it is scary for me to read this, because I am so "prone to wander." My natural self does not like to walk straight in Your ways. When I pray in the morning, my mind often wanders all over the place and does not focus on praying to You. And it's usually 10 minutes before I realize it and try to focus back. So often – especially during the evening, I am tempted to evil, and I don't "restrain my feet." O God, why do You give drought to them and not to me? I guess the key is that they LOVE to wander and have done nothing to restrain it. They were totally given over to their sin and did not care about God or even try to follow you. O Lord, please keep me and my family from that kind of rebellion!*

vs. 13-16 The prophets who spoke only of peace and prosperity were not from God! They had even fooled the prophet Jeremiah! Such people who speak falsehood in God's name deserve death for mocking Almighty God.

*O Lord, please never let me speak falsely - even mistakenly! And give me discernment to know which of the many voices out there in my culture are really speaking Your message. Not everything I am told is true!*

As the chapter ends, Jeremiah

(1) Once again brings out the suffering of the people (vs. 17-18),

(2) Reminds God of His attributes of grace and faithfulness (v.19),

(3) Acknowledges sin – not just personal sin, but the collective sin of his people (v.20),

(4) Reminds God of His covenant and of His reputation (v.21),

(5) And acknowledges God for Who He is, calling all other gods "vanities." He says that God is their only hope, for only He has the power to save and forgive (v.22).

What a case! *Lord, help me pray like that!*

# Chapter 15

God replies to this second appeal (from ch. 14 v. 17-22) by saying, “Forget it! No one can convince me to turn back from the punishment I’m giving out.” He goes on to speak of how these people will die: killed by swords in battle, killed by starvation from the famine, eaten by wild animals, or taken captive in a foreign country. If you read your history, you’ll see it really did come true.

v.4 Why? “Because of Manasseh…” Who was that? See 2 Kings 20 & 2 Chronicles 33. Manasseh was the son of one of the best of Israel’s & Judah’s kings (Hezekiah). But apparently Hezekiah, godly man that he was, did not bring up his son well. Manasseh rebuilt all the altars to the idols of the other nations and worshiped them – even in the temple! He got into the occult, and he encouraged all the people in the nation to sin. He paid no heed when prophets confronted him with his sin. Although he repented later in life, the people of Israel continued in the sins he had led them into, and his son who ruled after him was wicked. Why does God bring this up? Because the people were still worshiping idols that Manasseh had set up fifty or more years ago!

*Oh God, please let Your soul “be towards” me and my people (v.1); let me be a godly man like Jeremiah and Hezekiah, but let me raise my children to be godly and not have a Manasseh. Dear God, let me never worship and pay attention to any God but You!*

v.5 Really, who but God and His people will ever be gracious and have pity? *Lord, give me a sensitive heart to the needs of other people so that I can exercise this godly attribute of pity.*

v.6 Does this mean that God has repented many times, turning away from punishing His people, or does it man that God is tired of seeing His people repenting and then going back into sin and repenting again? I’d lean toward the former, because God is always happy at true repentance, yet He would be perfectly consistent with His merciful love AND His perfect justice to finally punish after being very gracious for a long time.

v.7 I think that this fork may be for raking the ground or for pitching grain to get rid of chaff, rather than for eating. They’ll be leveled – purified of chaff, and this will be done “in the gates of the land,” meaning perhaps that this will not be a private “putting away” but a public thing. Important transactions took place at the city gate. News was passed on at the city gate. That was the place to “hang out.” When God does this, folks all over the continent will talk about it at their city gates. It will be an example to the world that God doesn’t put up with sin.

v.8 This thing about the widows is interpreted differently in different translations. At first, I was thinking that the widow’s sins against God were more numerous

than the sands of the sea, but NASB & NIV make more sense that God will kill so many men in His judgment that there will be a lot of widows. God not only will kill the men, but the women too (v.9) as well as children! Everyone will suffer.

v.1 Is this Jeremiah speaking a lament that he himself was born (He has a hard message to carry, and everyone hates him for it!), or is this an example of a possible lament that one of the people will say as they are being punished for their wickedness? If the former is true, then verses 11 & 12 could be interpreted as a word of peace and protection to Jeremiah by God, but the fact that there is no break between vs.12 and 13 makes me think that it is the latter.

In the judgment, people will wish they had never been born. They will feel persecuted by everyone. God wishes to free His people from their sin – or perhaps God is being facetious here, saying that they'll finally be free of Him and all His rules… Their enemies will come when they are in distress and will destroy their possessions and take them captive into a foreign land. They will be strong as iron and have weapons forged from the strong metals of the North. God again makes it clear at the end of v.14 that this is a punishment from Him; it is neither a mistake nor chance.

vs. 15-18 What a prayer! I think this is Jeremiah responding in frustration and grief in the prayer barter. He comes close to impugning God's good character. This prayer belies a deep relationship that Jeremiah has had for a long time with God. It is not an impetuous prayer; it is not like hastily "flipping off" a stranger who offended him. This is the sort of prayer that really can't be prayed by a young Christian.

*Oh God, let me be able to say such things: "Your word was to me the joy and gladness of my heart," "I did not sit with the merry-makers… I sat alone."*

Jeremiah has had a close relationship with God; he has studied the Bible; he has obeyed it; he has had to be different and to take reproach from other people. For God to not honor his prayer for his people and to say that every man, woman, and child will be killed or taken into captivity is just too much for him.

v.19ff God finally answers with the wonderful grace Jeremiah has been looking for: "If you return, then…" "If you take the precious from the worthless…" There is provision for forgiveness of the repentance. Notice it says "If you return, I will bring you AGAIN. We were in favor with God and have rebelled against Him, but even if we have rebelled many times, He will still be gracious and bring us back in good standing if we truly turn away from sin and turn to Him, truly seeking to obey Him, fully and getting rid of the worthless ways of the sinful human world and its idolatries, clinging to God's word and His people and to His Spirit, the most precious things in the world.

When this happens, what does it mean we “will become [His] mouth”? The next verse makes it clearer, “Let them turn back to You…” When we follow God, it is a natural outworking of His plan and of our Godly desires to speak to other people about God, that they might turn to Him too!

*Oh Lord, let me be Your mouth. Please use me to turn many people to You. Let me never turn to sinful ways.*

When we live so, then there is nothing that can harm us, for God protects us. (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5, Prov. 4:6, Eccl. 7:19). *Lord, I praise You for Your protection.*

# Chapter 16

God's admonition to not marry and have children (Notice how the two are related – marriage and children, unlike nowadays when people marry but try to prevent the blessings of having children!) during this coming time of calamity reminds me of Paul's similar admonition just before the widespread persecution of the church in 1 Cor. 7:25-26.

I think that this is not a message personally to Jeremiah but to all the people of Judah. "Do not get married and have children because God is going to kill them all off anyway!" I fear that my children may grow up in just such a time.

God next says not to mourn for all those who die. This is because their deaths are punishment for their many sins. You're not supposed to mourn that an evil man received capital punishment (although, I'd say its fine to be mighty sober about it)! These things mentioned: "entering the house of mourning" (Eccl. 7:2), "weeping and moaning and mourning" (Jer. 9:17, Ezek. 24:17, 2 Sam. 18:2, Eccl. 12, Mat. 2:18), "cutting" themselves (Deut. 14:1), "shaving" themselves or "drinking" and "eating" to "comfort" the mourners were all things done in that culture to mourn somebody's death. Are there any inappropriate ways in which we mourn the dead?

v.8 When there is such wickedness among the people, God does not want us to participate in their parties and entertainment – what would it profit us? There is so much in our culture nowadays in the realm of entertainment, but what of it is really profitable, edifying, beneficial – a worthwhile investment of our time? (Eccl. 7:2)

v.10 The people seem to be more upset about losing their entertainment than about all Jeremiah's prophecies of destruction, death, and exile. But all this will come because God's people have consistently "followed other gods," walking "after the stubbornness of their own hearts," and have not "listened to God" – worshiped and obeyed Him.

v.9 is quite reminiscent of Revelation 18:21-24 – the destruction of Babylon. Israel receives similar punishment to the nation that captured her, and so does the evil world system (named after Israel's captors) in the end times.

vs. 14-17 But, this does not seal God's testimony. When He punishes His people, God will not have the nations mock Him. He intends to get the maximum glory from all nations by miraculously restoring Israel after it has been completely scattered.

v.18 He is making is known that He is holy and just by punishing those who have denigrated His name.

v.19 He will make the nations realize that the gods they worship are "vanity." (Yet another allusion to Ecclesiastes. I wonder if Jeremiah had just been reading

Ecclesiastes?) God intends to bring the nations to Himself and to make them realize that He is God. This is the whole scheme behind all of God's actions!

*Lord, please enable me to take part in this great plan. Keep me from the empty diversions of this world and let me serve and worship only You,by God. Please let me be useful in telling other people about You. Free my tongue. Give me people whom I may tell about You.*

# Chapter 17

vs. 1-18 God makes it clear that He wants His people to worship and trust only Him – not idols or men, and we see another prayer of Jeremiah.

vs. 1 & 13 God keeps a carefully-written record of our sins. I think that the sin of the unregenerate who are rebellious to God is kept in permanent form (engraved with diamond stylus) while the sins of God's true people are written in erasable ink which can be washed clean by the blood of Christ and be remembered no more upon confession and the seeking of forgiveness.

v.2 O God, how wicked a people is when they are just as fond of false gods as they are of their own children! Would that it were not true of my country too. Look at the hatred we have for our own children: killing them through abortion, avoiding them through birth control, and shunning them if they are born (spending only a few seconds a day on average with them). And yet see how fond my people are of their idols: sex, socializing, entertainment media, money, shopping, materialism, etc. We are really messed up! If Judah deserved Your punishment, how much more so do we!

*O God, have mercy! I beg of you to bring about spiritual renewal among my people. Please do this so that we don't have to undergo the same thing that Judah did! But if this request is not in line with Your will, please look upon me and the many Christians here who really do love You and put trust in you, and spare us.*

vs. 3-4 Again the judgment of invasion, plunder, and captivity is pronounced.

vs. 5-8 Cursed is the one who trusts in man… blessed is he who trusts in Jehovah. How much plainer can it be?!

*God, please make my heart to trust only in You.*

It is so easy to depend on our job, our money, our friends, and our government, yet they will all fail us. Only Jehovah will not fail; only our God will be perfectly just and faithful, and His grace surpasses all others!

Notice that it is the Godly man who lives "without fear" and "is not worried." This can really be true when we totally trust in God and just give our lives over to Him, patiently waiting for His will to be done instead of fearing what MIGHT happen. God is in complete control of the entire universe, and the things which He has planned for every second of your future are to His glory and our edification (Rom. 8:28). So why worry? And notice, it is the one who puts trust in Jehovah who bears FRUIT. ("By their fruits you shall know them…" ~Matt. 7)

vs. 9-10 How wicked and deceitful is my heart! It is more wicked and deceitful than anything else, says Jeremiah. Why then trust in another person? We will never know another person's heart entirely – what their inward thoughts are, but God

knows every one perfectly. He will know how to reward each person in all fairness according to every thought and action and word which they have made all their lives.

It's kinda interesting to see so many people nowadays who have made themselves their own god – this is probably the most prevalent religion in the U.S. right now – yet they, by trusting in themselves, are committing to what God says is the most deceitful and wicked thing!

*O God, let me trust in You alone and not "lean to my own understanding" (Prov. 3:5)! Let me seek Your thoughts and desires rather than my own, for my heart is very wicked. I praise You for Your grace that has forgiven my sin and which renews my mind and leads me out of temptation. Keep it up, Lord! What a rich passage this is! How wonderful are Your words!*

v.11 I've seen plenty of people who trust in money, working long hours, getting on insurance plans of all sorts, saving money in big bank accounts, not being generous. And it will all leave them in the end. They will feel quite foolish at the end of their lives when they have no fruit to show – only a lot of money and things.

*vs.12-14 But You, O God, You are the One in whom is all my trust! Your glory is unimaginable; You rule the entire universe from high above it. You have been around since before the beginning of anything. You are my sanctuary (Ps. 18:1-2); I take refuge in You! You are the fountain of living water (John 4:7-15); You give me life, and I am satisfied. "Heal me, O LORD, and I will be healed; save me, and I will be saved, for You are my praise!"*

Yet even in the midst of Jeremiah's praise to God, there are people making fun of him, saying, "Hey, why hasn't God yet done these dreadful things you keep talking about? You must be a false prophet! What you say will never come true! Hey, don't forget that the law calls for false prophets to be stoned to death!" The people of Jerusalem were persecuting Jeremiah. This will happen whenever we follow Christ (1 John 3:1-3). But rather than retaliating and getting angry, Jeremiah "entrusted himself to the One who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:1-23) – that is, God Himself.

Hear his prayer in verses 15-18: Jeremiah reminds God that he has not run away (like Jonah did!) from doing the work ("shepherding") which God has called him to do. He has not "desired the woeful day" – perhaps he loves his people and is not looking forward to them being punished. He's not seeking revenge on those who have persecuted him. He reminds God that he has said only what God has told him to say – he's always spoken "before [God's] face." (Wow, I wish I could say that of myself!) He reminds God that he is trusting in God's refuge, so it is God's responsibility to take care of him. Then he asks God to curse the men who are persecuting him and to bring them to the judgment they justly deserve. This is a good pattern for prayer. It seems that many people in the Old Testament prayed in

this way (e.g. David in Psalm 7). When they were in trouble for obeying God – and evil people were persecuting them, they would remind God of their blamelessness, tell God that they trust in Him (therefore it is God's responsibility to protect them) and then call down curses upon the evil men.

vs. 21-27 It seems that God's response to Jeremiah's plea might not have been thing Jeremiah was hoping for. Because of his prophecies, people were persecuting Jeremiah. Jeremiah might have expected God to say, "Well done, son; now go take a vacation while I punish your enemies!" But no, God tells him to go back to the people who were persecuting him and to confront them with yet another sin, that of breaking the Sabbath! It is not easy to follow God's will because it goes totally against our human will. (No wonder Jonah ran when God told him what he wanted him to do!) Yet Jeremiah was obedient.

*O God, please give me the courage and self-discipline to obey You like Jeremiah, even though it is scary and though my flesh may really not want to do it!*

v.22 "Do not carry a burden on the Sabbath… nor do any work, but keep the Sabbath day holy…" (cf. Ex. 22:8-11) This commandment is important to God, and He wanted His people to be obedient to it. Apparently, the Jews overcompensated on this in later years, but at the time of Jeremiah's writing, the Jews were working and not resting on Sabbath. Sounds like my country today. We generally do not take a day of rest; more and more stores are open on Sunday, and more and more people are working on Sunday – even Christians. Even at Christian colleges, many students study on Sunday, just like any other day, and professors encourage it by assigning homework due on Monday morning. I made it a policy not to study at all on Sundays when I was in school, and not to work a regular job on Sunday either – not even to do work around the home like yardwork or repairs. I try to spend the day doing restful activities or a different form of ministry than that which I would do during the week.

At any rate, God hates it when He gives a command and we do not obey it, and He promises great blessings for obedience to the Sabbath law as well as great punishment for disobedience and "not listening."

*Dear God, let me listen carefully to all You have to say to me. And help me to know how best to obey You in the matter of keeping the Sabbath holy.*

# Chapter 18

vs. 1-6 The analogy of the potter and clay to God and people is awesome. I remember watching a potter do a chapel presentation on this passage, and it is amazing to see all the parallels that can be drawn!

*God, I am clay in Your hands. You can do whatever You wish, and I cannot complain about what You make of me or what You do to me. As You sanctify me, do what is good in Your eyes. I do not know what is good for myself except that You reveal it to me. O God, give me humility like clay - which is just dirt. Let me be pliable in Your hands and obedient and yielded to You.*

vs. 7-10 According to the righteousness of a nation or people, so God rewards them. If they repent, He doesn't punish. If they turn away from Him, He no longer blesses.

*O God, is it possible that my nation could repent and escape the terrible judgment that is surely due it?*

vs. 11-12 Jeremiah is instructed to call rebellious Judeans to repent and do good, even though they would rather "walk after their own thoughts… according to the stubbornness of [their] evil heart[s]." That makes me wince, for how often I do my own thing and stubbornly follow my flesh, turning away from God?

*O God, I don't want to live in rebellion against You! I want to walk after Your thoughts and not follow my own evil heart but be obedient to Your Word, the Bible. Help me, Lord to live in obedience to You, my King, rather than in intermittent rebellion. How difficult if must be to have a subject like me who is unpredictable in following Your commands – sometimes obedient and sometimes rebellious. I can imagine that this would disincline any ruler to put responsibility into the hands of such a servant. O God, please change me!*

vs. 13-17 God's people should be intimately associated with Him (every other religious system has a close relationship – or at least a fanatical devotion – between the god and its people), and so it is really strange and illogical for Christians to forsake Jehovah for other gods. Therefore God will judge His people for their rebellion against Him, and He will make it known to all the world too.

vs. 18-23 As could be expected, those people who were persecuting Jeremiah were not at all thrilled to see him return with another message! Reminds me of Terry Scott Taylor's song about the dilemma of prophets who love their people and hope to carry God's word to some receptive ear, yet are rejected and persecuted by most for their message. "Bounce him off the rubber sky/ and he'll come back to taunt you./ Slingshot snap brings him back/ those lover's eyes that haunt you."

Well, in Jeremiah's case, they were abusing him verbally – and perhaps had also set a physical trap – snares for his feet and a pit to keep him in. Jeremiah is indignant, but at least he doesn't lambast the people. He once again takes his case to God and asks God to bring down some really heavy punishment on them. Some of it sounds downright uncharitable – asking God not to forgive them and to starve them and all – but these people had already been given over to God's wrath, and they were clearly unrepentant. This was not just a whim or a personal grudge of Jeremiah's. God was already planning to do these things to these people; He had already revealed to Jeremiah His intention to do these things. So Jeremiah is coming back to say, "God, they've heard enough; let 'em have it!"

It is appropriate to call curses down upon evil people for whom God makes clear that judgment is due, people who are unrepentant after having been given chances to repent. For instance, I have decided to call curses down upon strip bars when I see their advertisements on billboards on the highway. Not only does this help put me in the right frame of mind (anger against sin rather than being allured by it), but there are many places in the Bible that make it clear that those who practice sexual immorality are not going to heaven (Lev. 20:10, 1 Cor. 6:9, Heb. 13:4, Col. 3:5, etc.). At the same time, our prayers would not be complete if we didn't also pray for God to bring salvation to the patrons of such establishments.

# Chapter 19

They had elders back then – older men who often sat at the city gate (Deut. 21:19, 22:15, Prov. 31:23, Lam. 5:14) to settle disputes (Deut. 19:12 & 22ff., Josh. 20:4, Ruth 4:9-11). They were a ruling body (Ex. 3:16-18, 4:29, 17:5-6, 18:12, 19:7, 24:1,-14, Lev. 4:15, Num. 11:16-25) of at least 10 men (Ruth 4:2). The Egyptians, Moabites, and Midianites also had elders (Gen. 50:7, Num. 22:7). According to 1 Kings 8:1-3, the elders of Israel were the foremost of the tribes and families and firstborn sons. From them Moses chose 70 (Num. 11:16, Ex. 19:7, Deut. 27:1, Josh 8:10), and the Sanhedrin came from that tradition (Matt. 26:59, Luke 7:3, 22:52), although there were other elders not of the 70. The concept of elders in the early church was a logical outflow of this tradition. Anyway, the word used here for "elders" is actually a generic term for older men and women – perhaps 60 years or older (Lev. 27:1-8). Priests, incidentally, retired at the age of 50 (Num. 4:3-30).[2]

Interesting that Jeremiah refers to the elders as "kings" in v.3, probably underscoring their ruling function. Anyway, God tells Jeremiah to do a simple object lesson: Carry a clay pot to Potsherd Gate, Jerusalem, and break it, signifying that God will break His people because of their sin.

What sin?

- v.4 Forsaking God and turning to idols -
- v.5 especially Baal and especially heinous to God is the practice of Baal-worshipers to burn their first-born sons alive on the Baal-altar, and
- v.13 also speaks of Judah's worship and sacrifices to other gods.

How will God break/punish Judah for its idolatry?

- vs. 6-7 & 11 – slaughter,
- v.8 – plagues,
- v.9 – siege in which people will be so starved that they will resort to cannibalism.

Was this fulfilled? Yes. Look at 2 Chron. 36:11-21 and 2 Kings 24 and 25. Many were slaughtered, and sieges were indeed laid. God's word will always come true. He is faithful to make good on all His promises! He is just and WILL punish evildoers (Was not Judah evil-doing by burning their children alive on the Baal-altar?!) He is a jealous God Who cannot tolerate His people worshiping other gods.

*O God, let me never worship any other God but You!*

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2 Much of these comments is copied from Spiros Zodhiates' *Lexical Aids to the Old and New Testaments.*

# Chapter 20

Here is the sad story of another P.K. (priest's kid) that was a rotten egg – Pashur. How awful it is when the full-time servants of God do not train their children up in God's ways!

Pashur beat Jeremiah up and put him in stocks, exposing Jeremiah to public shame. Pashur apparently was a false prophet (v.6) who didn't like the fact that Jeremiah's words contradicted his own. (How hard it is to hear the truth!)

I wish that I could say things like Jeremiah said to Pashur to those who contradict me! But this too is a prophecy – so specific that he prophesies (for the first time, I think) that the captivity will be in Babylon and that Pashur and all his friends will die there.

*Dear God, just as You gave words to Jeremiah to respond to Pashur, please also give me words to respond to everyone who speaks to me – godly words that will be to the glory of Your Name. You know how slow of wit I am and how difficult it is for me to speak. Thank You for Your assurance that You will give me Your words (Matt. 10:18-20).*

Perhaps verses 7-18 came to Jeremiah while he was in the stocks. "I am in derision all the day; everyone laughs at me… Jehovah has been a reproach to me… I hear the slanders of many." Jeremiah was depressed. Look at verses 14-18 where he wishes he had never been born. This guy is really down. It seems that verses 7-18 portray a struggle within Jeremiah between his relationship with God (and the hope that is there) and the hopelessness of his own self and the bad straits (humanly speaking) he is in. Verses of praise to God are juxtaposed with descriptions of his ridicule and wishes that he had never been born.

Although we might not be facing the kind of persecution Jeremiah faced, we too are caught between the ridiculousness of that we do on earth and the spiritual realities behind what we do. Here I am, trying to support a family off an $18,000 annual salary (before taxes), and my wife not working outside the home, giving away 20% of my income to needy Christians and missionaries, with no savings account, using no birth control, encouraging 40 students to encourage them to recruit missionaries. How foolish! You better believe that we, like Jeremiah, sometimes teeter between praising God and asking ourselves what the heck we're doing! I guess that's just part of being a Christian.

*Lord, keep us faithful to You and let us not loose heart, no matter how stupid we think the things are that You call us to do.*

vs. 7-9 Just as Jeremiah entertained the thought that perhaps God had deceived him and that he wasn't prophesying the real truth and thus quit prophesying for a time, so it is when we Christians get depressed. I'm sure that there are plenty of

missionaries who struggle with this very thing and just want to quit trying to evangelize anyone. Actually, many of us Christians have figured out how to keep that "fire" comfortably "shut up on our bones." We turn it into our own central heating system rather than share the Gospel with non-Christians around us. So we grow warm and fat and lazy. But, if we are truly Christians who are sensitive and obedient to God, He will not let us be silent. He will prevail over our flesh when He wants to get His message out. We won't be able to sit still when He kindles that fire under us. He wants us to set other people "on fire" for Him.

*O God, let me not shut You up; loose my tongue to tell others about You. Please show me how You want me to impact the community where I live. I would venture to guess that there might not be enough real Christians to count on one hand. But what can I do? How to I set others aflame for You?*

vs. 10-13 If we truly are Christians and living like the Bible instructs us to, we will face persecution from the non-Christian community as well as from the "cultural Christian" community. We will undergo hardships – public ridicule, financial stricture, malicious damage to possessions, etc. I believe we will see more and more of this in our country as time goes on. But Jeremiah's words are quite a comfort (Remember that this guy said this while in the stocks – or just out of them, so it is not a trite thing!): "But Jehovah is with me like a mighty, awesome One. My persecutors will stumble; they will not prevail; they will be greatly shamed…"

Let us pray with Jeremiah, "Let me see YOUR vengeance on them, for I have revealed my cause to You." In the midst of persecution, Jeremiah simply laid his cause before God and asked Him to take care of the situation, because He knew that God is just and that God is in total control with all power, and therefore He will indeed punish those who were persecuting Jeremiah. Then, in full faith that God will do this, Jeremiah started singing praise songs to God. This is the proper way to deal with persecution.

*If I am martyred, may I do the same and die singing praise to my mighty, awesome God!*

# Chapter 21

This Pashur and Zephaniah are apparently not the same Pashur from ch. 20 and not the same Zephaniah who wrote the book of the Bible by that name – their father's names don't match.

Jeremiah sure had a lot of pluck! To deliver a message like this to the priest and the king of his country was sure to get him in trouble!

vs. 9-10 The prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem gets even more specific as Jeremiah states the name of the king and the name of the country which will attack and carry the Jews captive. He basically says, "Don't bother to fight; just give yourselves up and let them take you as live captives, otherwise you'll get killed when they come."

God makes it clear once again that this is <u>His</u> doing in v.5 – that this is His punishment for their sin. And He reminds them of their sin, saying in v.12 that if the king will turn from the sin of injustice and oppression of the poor, God will not punish the nation as severely.

This king was apparently proud and thought that the Babylonians wouldn't win against him in battle. He was also selfish and was oppressing poor people – perhaps taxing them so he could live in comfort.

*O God, let me never be as dull to You as was King Zedekiah. Please transform my proud, selfish heart to a humble , unselfish one that I may not go the way of Zedekiah! And Lord, if You have any offensive messages for me to carry, please give me the boldness of Jeremiah to speak Your words plainly.*

# Chapter 22

God gave Jeremiah a message to King Jehoiakim, and it was quite something! He prophecied that Jehoiakim will be killed and thrown in the garbage (v.19) and that his son and wife will be exiled, never to return (v.28). He adds that king Nebuchadnezzar will destroy Judah and its cities and people and take them captive. Jehoiakim's sons will not become kings in Judah.

Look at 2 Kings 23:28-24:17 and 2 Chronicles 36 to see the context and fulfillment of this prophecy. It was specifically fulfilled:

- Jehoiakim had been taxing the people severely to pay duty to the king of Egypt.
- Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiakim captive, along with many others.
- Jehoiakim's favored son, Coniah, did not succeed him, just as Jeremiah had prophesied, (rather, Jehoiachin was placed in rulership), but was carried off to exile with his mother.
- The cities and the temple were destoyed by the Chaldean army, just as Jeremiah prophecied.

WHY? The writer of 2 Kings tells us that he heavily taxed his subjects. God's accusation through Jeremiah is that Jehoiakim was oppressing the people, doing them violence and injustice (vs. 5 & 17). He also charges Jehoiakim with forsaking the Covenant and worshiping and serving other gods (v.9). Since Israel was under bondage to the Egyptians, perhaps he introduced Egyptian gods or something. This is a grievous sin before the True and Living God. When we feel that <u>anything</u> is more important than God and we seek to do anything rather than obey Him, this is the same thing. In our culture, we worship ourselves by seeking to feel good, to get ahead, to make more money, to improve ourselves, to have more fun. Rather than seeking to do only what God wants, we do what <u>we</u> want. This is just as heinous in the sight of the LORD as bowing down before wooden idols.

The second sin of Jehoiakim was that of exploiting his own people. Jehoiakim's search for ease was lifelong (v.22). This passage reminds me of Habakkuk 2:9 &13-14. (Habakkuk's prophecy was written around this time – maybe a few years earlier.) Jehoiakim was making himself a nice pad at the expense of his people. (Perhaps he was building a plush hideout in Lebanon, to escape the Chaldean invasion?) But a leader should not exalt himself above his people. It is wrong for men to build nicer homes and offices for themselves as they climb up the corporate ladder. It is wrong for rich people to seek plush homes and fancy cars. Self-indulgence, selfishness, and idolatry is a stench in God's nose now, just as it was in Jeremiah's time.

*God, let me never become proud in my leadership role. Let me never seek perks and benefits for myself. I will never keep more than I really need, and that means that if You provide for me far beyond my need, I will be generous to the needy, even as You have been to me. Dear God, may Your people be just and righteous and a blessing to the immigrants, orphans, widows, and truly needy. Take away violence from my land against the innocent! Would that these things would become true of my country.*

But I fear that this will not be the case with us, even as it wasn't for Judah. God set apart and "commissioned (consecrated) destroyers to punish." I'm sure that the Jews who thought of the temple as consecrated were shocked to find that God had "consecrated" a mob of gentile warriors! But God will use whom He wants, and He will bring justice to the earth and glory to His name.

# Chapter 23

After God gets done admonishing the king in chapter 22, He turns His attention to the prophets and priests. This must have been a difficult thing for Jeremiah because he lived in a town full priests and prophets. He was now preaching to his next-door neighbors and long-time friends.

*O God, give me the courage and wisdom to confront those close to me with your prophetic messages against sin.*

vs. 1-4 seem to give an overview of the prophecy: Because the priests have done wrong and misled the people, scattering them away from God, God will scatter the people into exile, then gather them back again after a time under godly leaders (Zerubbabel and Nehemiah after the 70 year Babylonian captivity).

*O God, I know that You hold under close scrutiny and accountability those who are spiritual leaders. Let me never be a bad spiritual leader! Let me not scatter people from YOU, but rather teach them so that they won't be "missing anything." God, this is impossible by my own self; I need to be sensitive to Your Spirit and obedient to You.*

vs. 5-8 are Messianic prophecy: Jeremiah prophesies a righteous and just King to come from the family line of David. Jesus Christ fulfills that prophecy!

- Jesus was from the family line of David;
- He lived the only perfectly-righteous life ever lived by a man;
- He provided salvation and provides protection over His people (Christians);
- He is God ("Jehovah"), and He is "our righteousness." When Jesus, the Righteous One, died on the cross and went to hell as a substitute punishment for our unrighteousnesses, His righteousness was transferred to us and so He is our Righteousness! Praise God! (1 Cor. 1:30, Rom. 3:21-26, 5:17-21, 2 Cor. 5:21, 2 Pet. 1:1)

*Thank you, Jesus, for saving me and being my righteousness!*

Ever become convicted of a specific sin, and you suddenly see it everywhere? It becomes overwhelming to see how hopelessly sinful everyone is. Is your heart broken by this; do your bones shake; do you feel faint when you see the magnitude of sin in your life and hopeless depths of moral decay into which your culture has fallen? Are we as serious as God is about sin in verse 9?

*Lord, let me not take sin so lightly! Purify me of my sin and separate me from it!*

Following is a list of the specific sins of the priests:

- vs. 10&14 – ADULTERY: perhaps sexual, perhaps spiritual (worshiping idols instead of their own true God)
- vs. 11 & 14 – UNGODLINESS/EVIL: turning away from God and His laws to follow other gods, strengthening evil men
- v. 13 & 14 – FRIVOLITY
- and FALSE PROPHECY: speaking in the name of the false god Baal and misleading people with falsehood

In verses 12 & 15, God promises to punish them by making them slip and fall and be driven out by the Babylonian army – and feeding them with wormwood and poisonous water there so they will die. God is seriously upset at them! And rightly so.

*Lord, let me never be unfaithful to You as a way of life, and let me say only Your words and lead people into righteousness and godliness. Let me not ever be frivolous, doing what is not important; help me, Lord!*

Verses 16-40 deal with false prophets. It's interesting that the mark of a true prophet in v. 22 is that they proclaim God's word to His people and turn them away from doing evil. In other words, a prophet is sent to God's people living in sin, and he brings about a change. Beware any man with a "message from God" which confirms you and makes you comfortable and that discourages you from seeking to change or to turn from sinful patterns. A true prophet is offensive to your flesh.

Do not waste your time on idle words. We are so prone to talk about empty things with no eternal value. How much time do we spend complaining, telling jokes, talking about the weather, movies, sports, games, etc.?

*O Lord, please give me the discipline to speak only what is edifying to other people and hold my tongue from idleness.*

Yet worse than idleness is the lying tongue of a false prophet – anyone who says their own thoughts and words and attributes them to God (v.16). How difficult it must have been for Jeremiah to contradict the oracles of a host of false prophets who all said, "Thus says the Lord…"

*Dear God, let me never speak falsely and attribute my own notions to You. And when I do have a prophetic message and everyone around me doesn't believe it, please give me the courage and faithfulness that You gave Jeremiah! Let me "stand in Your council" (v.22)!*

*vs. 23-24 God, I praise You that Your Spirit is omnipresent! What an awesome God You are to be able to be at all places at all times. It means You are always*

*close-by and always able to hear my prayers and to act on behalf of Your people. I praise You for this!*

Conversely, it is disconcerting to know that not a single sin is hidden from God. We do certain sins secretly when no one is around to see us, but God is always there so see us because He is everywhere!

*O God, help me to live this reality and turn away from secret sin, as I live under the loving gaze of Your eyes.*

vs. 25-40 It must have been confusing to the people of Judah to see one true prophet give a message from God and then to hear another false prophet give an entirely contradictory message. How do you tell the difference? The messenger who is truly from God is offensive to your flesh. His message is like fire or a hammer (v.29); it burns away the dross and shatters away the dirt.

*Lord, let me "speak [Your] word faithfully."*

Similar confusion happens in some churches today. A friend who attend an international meeting of the Church of God of Prophecy observed one man rise up and speak in tongues, and it was interpreted along the lines of, "Thus says the Lord, what this man says is good, follow him." Then someone else stood up and contradicted him, saying something like, "My people, my people, you must follow in the old way…" And they went back and forth, claiming that their contradictions were God's word. What a mockery this makes of God! (On the opposite extreme is Presbyterian churches where there is never any oracle of the Lord!) In the former case (as it was in Jeremiah's time) it is best to forbid any prophecy – "Let no one say, 'Thus says the Lord…'" If there is a true prophet, you will not be able to silence him, even if you punish him severely (Remember Jer. 20:9?). "But let every flattering lip and every boastful tongue be cut off!" (Ps. 12)

# Chapter 24

God shows Jeremiah a vision of baskets of figs – some of them are luscious, and others are rotten. The luscious figs represent God's people that had been exiled. God still acknowledges these as His people; He sent them into exile for their good, and He promises to restore them. He is using this experience to turn their hearts to Him.

*God, I praise You that You consider me Your adopted son and that You do only good to me. Let my heart be wholly turned to You, God! Let me accept difficulty and grow closer to You in it.*

The bad figs represent the rotten rulers and people that remained in Judah (and those who had fled to Egypt). From the immediate context, it's hard to know why God wants to curse the remaining people in Judah, but I can understand why God curses the king and rulers. Kings and rulers have a special responsibility before God to do justice and righteousness and to guide people into godliness. When rulers do not do these things,they are worthy of a curse more severe than those not in authority, for they have greater power to cause harm with wickedness and they have great influence on the people under their authority. This particular king also was being cursed because of his father's sins. I think it should be understood as him being punished for CONTINUING his father's sins, not as God punishing an innocent party for his father's sins.

The only clue that I can find in the context as to why God cursed the remaining people not taken into captivity is the simple fact that Jeremiah later had to flee for his life into Egypt because the people in Judah were angry at him for his prophesies. This indicates that the people were not righteous and were not willing to listen to God. Thus God cursed them and promised to drive them into exile and kill them.

Note that their punishment will be recognized by "all the nations" – another example of God's concern for other nations besides Israel.

# Chapter 25

(vs. 1-7) What a sentence! Jeremiah delivers a message to Judah and the surrounding nations that sounds much like the final sentencing of a judge in court.

For 23 years, Jeremiah has gotten up early and spoken God's words all day to the people, but the people have not heeded God's commands to turn from evil. Idol worship seems to be indicated here by the phrases "other gods" and "the work of their hands," although one might be able to construe "handiwork" to mean bad things done to other people (and perhaps construe v. 5 to mean that they were doing wrong by not living on the land God gave their fathers, i.e., not observing Jubilee debt-cancellation but being greedy for other family's land, an indictment which could be leveled at my country as well).

*Dear God, I have not been diligent in rising up early. Please help me to follow Jeremiah's example and wake up early and start working early in the day! And give me Jeremiah's perseverance too! What a depressing job You put before Jeremiah, to prophesy for 23 years and be ignored day after day after day. O God, give me perseverance in my work that You call me to do, even if I see few results.*

Verse 5 could be interpreted as a reward for repentance – if we turn from evil, then Jehovah will permit His people to live on their land and not be taken into captivity.

But in verses 8-11, the punishment is pronounced: Babylon will take Judah captive for 70 years. But this captivity would not happen until some years into the future.

(v.12ff) In 70 more years, God will punish Babylon with slavery and desolation. And indeed it did happen just as God said: the Medes and Persians took over Babylon some 70 years later.

(v.13) See Jer. 12:14-17 for a prophesy that Jeremiah already gave concerning Babylon. Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and some of the minor prophets also prophesied this.

Verses 18-26 use old names for countries and geographical regions, the names of which have changed since then. It certainly covers Judah, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, and perhaps Southern Europe or North Africa ("coastlands beyond the sea"), as well as the desert areas of Iran, Iraq, and perhaps some of the southern Russian states. They are listed in this way to indicate that this is for ALL the nations of the entire earth, as v. 26 states explicitly. There is no nation, no group of any people that will not have to answer to the King of Kings. (This may actually be an apocalyptic prophecy for the end of time; if so, it wouldn't be the first in this book. Often God's national judgments within the lifetimes of the Biblical prophets are foreshadowings of ultimate judgment yet-to-come in the end.)

(v.29) If God must punish His people, He isn't going to leave the rest of the world un-punished. Jeremiah is to make the message known to all the world, that they are accountable to the Lord, who will judge and punish them.

(vs. 34-38) The "shepherds" refer to religious and political leaders. This synonym has been used in other places in the Bible with the same meaning (cf. Jer. 22:28-23:6, Ezekiel 34, 1 Pet. 5:4).

People in cushy leadership positions may feel insulated against calamity. They build business empires based on exploiting weak men and women, and they use their power to manipulate world events. These men think they have it made; they think, "I'll always be happy and never have trouble... God covers His face and never sees" " (Psalm 10). But the Lord is just, and He will destroy not only the wicked masses but will burn in His anger especially against wicked leaders. What a terrifying fall and punishment awaits them!

*Dear God, let me not be like those evil shepherds who would ignore Your prophets. Let me be highly sensitive to You and Your word and Your people. O God, I want to be obedient to You, not only because disobedience would be on the level of treason to You, my King, and severely punishable, but because You are my heavenly Father. I love You. I want to be like you; I want to mimic You just like a little boy looks up to his beloved father and copies him. I want to walk in Your steps and be pleasing to You. O God, give me such an infatuation with You that I won't care to do wrong things, but will only desire to do righteousness. And since I have been – and may continue to be – in a position of "shepherding," I am all the more accountable to You for every deed I do. I feel like dirt as I see my sin – lustfulness, self-centeredness, seeking attention, misplaced security (in my family and in my job instead of in You), and fruitlessness in evangelism. Let them not rule over me! Lord, You are my ruler. Let me never lead others into sin; let me never be one of those evil shepherds. Lord, help me lead people into righteousness!*

# Chapter 26

God has given a message to call people to repentance, and there are specific things said which are foretelling the future. The people don't like it – especially the priests and prophets in the temple! I can just imagine them coming in on the second part of Jeremiah's prophecy (v.6) and taking it out of context. Instead of asking, "What's the reason or message?" (Which was God's call to repentance and promise of peace if Judah obeyed), they asked, "Shouldn't this man be killed for blaspheming the temple and the people of God?"

The priests and the prophets (Jeremiah's work associates) riled up the people in the temple and got the political leaders to come over and listen to Jeremiah's prophecy. (His message must have either been longer than this excerpt in verses 4-6, or else he repeated these words a good number of times.)

The situation is not looking good for Jeremiah, but he was prepared to speak this message, even if he should die for it. He defends himself by re-stating that this message truly came from God and they will therefore be bringing judgment down upon themselves if they kill him in his innocence.

The gullible masses swing to the other side now and decide not to kill him after all. But then the elders of the people (the men who gave advice, were respected, and played a big part in local politics) began their debating. They would decide Jeremiah's fate. I'm sure it was a scary situation for Jeremiah.

The elders are apparently trying to decide what the historical precedent was for cases in which a prophet spoke against Jerusalem – how were they dealt with? Two cases are noted here in their deliberations: the cases of Micah and of Urijah.

- Micah was the guy who wrote the book in the Bible by the same name. Interesting how these elders remember only chapter 3 of his book, when most of the rest of the book has prophecies of God's restoring and blessing His people and bringing the Messiah to them. Micah chapter 3, however, contained a severe indictment against the religious and political leaders of the day. (They probably only heard the part that criticized them, just like pro-abortion folks tend to look only for statements that they can hate from pro-lifers and aren't really interested in responding to the heart of the message.)
    - I think v.19 means "<u>They</u> didn't put Micah to death, did they?" The Bible doesn't speak of Micah's death, but he probably passed towards the end of Hezekiah's reign. Since Micah must have prophesied during the reigns of Jotham and of Ahaz (the two kings preceding Hezekiah), his prophecy must have been early in Hezekiah's reign and may have been the reason

why Hezekiah started out as a good king and tore down all the idols (2 Kings 18). The the next half of verse 19 is about Hezekiah repenting.

- So it looks like the elders are making a good point that 100 years ago, Micah's prophecy came true: Sennacherib did try to attack Jerusalem, but the king of Judah (Hezekiah) was a good king and righteous before God, and when he repented and trusted in God, Jerusalem was spared. Therefore, if Jeremiah is from God, we would be doing wrong to kill him; we should heed his message.

- Also, just recently, a prophet named Urijah (not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible) had prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, but the current wicked king Jehoiakim had hunted him down and killed him. The question is; did they think Jehoiakim was wicked, or did they agree with his action? Perhaps they agreed, although they will understand in just a few more years how right Urijah and Jeremiah were, when King Nebuchadnezar of Babylon will lay siege to Jerusalem and take a bunch of captives (including King Jehoiakim) and make off with a bunch of stuff from the treasury and the temple!

So there are two conflicting legal precedents, but an influential elder (Ahikam) was willing to stick his neck out for Jeremiah at the risk of being stoned, and thus Jeremiah was not prosecuted.

*O God, whether I am a prophet or a godly man able to help a prophet, please give me boldness to speak up for the truth and defend the righteous.*

# Chapter 27

Now Jeremiah starts cutting down a few trees and whittling pieces off them, forming them into yokes and bands. Then, with a bunch of cattle yokes hanging from his neck and handcuffs dangling from his arms, he enters the capitol city and starts handing them to the ambassadors of all the neighboring countries, saying, "Submit to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when he comes to conquer your country." That's what the yokes symbolized, and that was the message God had given Jeremiah.

It is significant that long before the New Testament, God showed concern to other nations besides Israel. Almost all the Biblical prophets included prophecies for other nations.

And this message had an inherent evangelistic bent – these ambassadors were to tell their kings that the God of Israel, the Lord of Hosts of armies, is the One who created the earth and all that is in it, and that this God also directs all the affairs of men and has chosen to prosper Nebuchadnezzar for a time, so every nation that submits to him will have peace , and everyone who resists will be destroyed. This message called for faith that the message is true and that the prophets of all the local gods are false, a measure of belief in the One True God, and obedience to this God's command.

And Jeremiah brings the same basic message to the King of Judah.

Why Zedekiah instead of Jehoiakim?

- The prophecy to the other nations was at the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, and Zedekiah came to be king a while later, after Jehoiakim's successor, Jehoiachin's short reign. Perhaps there was a break of several years between verses 11 and 12? There is no mention of prophesies during Jehoiakim's later years or during Jehoiachin's reign. This second half of the prophecy may have been several years after the first half.
- Another possible explanation is that Zedekiah was more like a prime minister or co-regent with Jehoiakim, so he might have been in a position of kingly power at the same time as Jehoiakim, but this seems unlikely since Jehoiakim was a puppet-king under the control of Egypt and Zedekiah was a puppet-king under the control of Babylon.

At any rate, God instructed the King of Judah to submit fully to Nebuchadnezzar so as not to incur God's worse punishment of destruction and death. It was kind-of like God had three levels of punishment (cf. Leviticus 26 for more specifics on this):

1. When the people turned away from God, they had the pricking of their conscience and probably economic and social ills resulting from disobedience.
2. God called them to repent through the prophets or else be taken captive by Babylon.
3. If they still would not repent, then the last resort was for God to bring drastic measures like famine and destruction.

If the people had responded at any level, God would have been gracious, but the harder a heart is, the less it will respond, and the more drastic the consequences must be for hard-core rebellion.

- We can learn of the importance of multi-level punishment, whether it be the disciplining of children at home or the arrangement of political law and order. Small crimes should get small punishments, and the greater or more frequent the crime, the harsher the punishment should be. The death sentence is the ultimate punishment which can be imposed by civil government.
- We also learn that with every level of punishment must come the call to repentance and the hope of restoration. We must always give a chance to repent after chastisement. If their heart will not turn after light punishment, then perhaps it will turn with harsher punishment.

Isn't it awesome to see what a great example our God is for us in every area of life – even discipline!

Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, in spite of Jeremiah's exhortation, so all the punishments Jeremiah prophesied came true, in spite of all the other prophets' words to the contrary:

- Jerusalem was laid bare, and everything was cleaned out of the temple (2 Kings 24).
- But 70 years later, the King of Babylon sent Judeans back to Jerusalem with the stolen temple treasures to re-establish themselves (2 Chron. 36:11ff)!

*Dear God, I praise You for Your concern for all nations – and for saving me! I pray that I would be able to be a witness to other people as boldly as Jeremiah witnessed to all those ambassadors. Lord, let me always be sensitive and obedient to You and Your word spoken through your servants in the church, and not stubborn in my sin like Zedekiah!*

# Chapter 28

When Hananiah the prophet says that within two years, Nebuchadnezzar will no longer rule over Israel and the exiles and stolen goods from the temple will be returned, Jeremiah replies, “I hope so... But usually when God sends a prophet, it is to foretell doom, not peace, so your prophecy sounds strange to me. We’ll see in a couple of years if God truly sent you!”

Well, God let on to Jeremiah that Hananiah was full of beans and told him to confront Hananiah about it.

The false prophet’s message is ethno-centric, but Jeremiah’s message is not just for Israel but for all the nations – even for the animals! (v.14)

God told Jeremiah in verses 13-14 simply to correct the false prophet Hananiah and tell him that it only makes things worse for the Judeans to hear his false prophesy, but Jeremiah was upset at the blasphemy and audacity of this false prophet to make up his own message and say it was from God. Jeremiah lets him have it – no beating around the bush. He tells Hananiah outright that God didn’t send him, that he is lying to the people, and that he will die within the year! Whoah!

In church fellowships that accept prophecy as normal and which expect words of prophecy, it would be so easy for false prophecies to be made which would deceive many people who would respect those who prophesy. Beware those who prophesy that all is well – or that all will be well. True prophesy is always a difficult message to hear because it convicts you of sin.

*Dear God, let me be as serious about You and Your truth as zealous Jeremiah was. Give me his boldness to confront a liar head-on. Give me wisdom to discern Your truth from false human words. Let me have the security and faith of Jeremiah to be sure of Your messages and not to worry about what anybody else things of me.*

# Chapter 29

Jeremiah sends a letter to the exiles in Babylon by a couple of King Zedekiah's messengers who were going there. His message is this: "Settle in, folks. Move into houses, get jobs, and have kids. You'll be living there for 70 years. Don't believe what the false prophets say – don't try to leave, and don't refuse to unpack; go ahead and settle in."

Verse 7 is very interesting, "Seek the peace of the city there where I have caused you to be exiled, and pray to Jehovah for it; for in it's peace, you shall have peace." God wants us to be involved in our community and city by seeking to bring about peace and by praying for them. We should not be so "spiritual" that we make no investment in the people around us in our community and city.

*Lord, as I continue to pray for it, please show me how to seek the peace of my town while I'm here and not be so preoccupied with my Christian friends in other communities that I do not invest time with people right here.*

It occurs to me that a city has peace when it follows God's laws – both personally and corporately. I should seek to influence families to follow God's ways until there are enough families to influence the laws of the whole community/city.

vs. 10-14 God didn't orchestrate this exile out of meanness; He had a definite plan. He has a good plan for all of our lives and for all of history. And His plan is to bring His people closer to Him and to glorify His name among all the nations. This exile is for the purpose of turning the hearts of the Judeans back to Him so that they "shall seek [Him] and find [Him]." These plans are to give them a "future" with real "hope."

As I contemplate the fact that I am being "exiled" (laid off) from my job this month, it is a comfort to know that this is for good and not for evil. Lord, let me trust You as You reveal Your plan and let me grow closer to You and glorify Your name!

In vs. 15-32, God directs His attention to the false prophets – 3 in particular – who have tried to deceive the Jews in Babylon. Jeremiah reiterates the prophesy from 24:4-10 that whoever was not captured and taken to Babylon but remained in Judah would be punished; no one would escape the judgment God had fashioned for His people because of their rebellion.

It's interesting that this is so different from our Western individualist thinking. God is treating a whole nation like a single corporate body which has sinned against Him, and He is punishing them <u>all</u>. God really does look – not only at individuals, but also – at communities, cities, families, and nations as single bodies which will together receive either His blessing or His curse. The concept of Him being one's "personal savior" is only half-true, for God would like to be the savior of <u>all</u> of a

family and all of a nation. He is the savior of the world! We must learn to have more concern for others in our families, neighborhoods, cities, and nations. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals tended to withdraw from the educational, social, economic, and political parts of my nation since the turn of the 20th century, and now, at the turn of the 21st century, there is so much evil that God is judging my whole nation with economic and relational hardship. Even Christians are experiencing this because we have too long assumed that we have satisfied God's interests when we have personally received Christ, but no, we must not stop with ourselves; we must desire and work towards the renewal and salvation of all the groups of people we are in, too!

Apparently Ahab (not the king of old) and Zedekiah had made false prophesies that reached the ears of the exiles, so God, through Jeremiah, sets them straight in this letter to the exiles and tells them who these two guys really are: "They have committed disgraceful folly in Israel and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken a lying word in my name…" (Would you believe a guy who sleeps around and tells lies and then tells you the has a word from the LORD??") So God pronounces horrible judgment on them: they'll be roasted in a fire, and – what's worse – the memory of their names will always be associated with a curse!

*Dear God, please keep me from the heinous sins of adultery and lying, which are so easy to do in my culture, but, if committed, would wreck dreadful damage to You, to myself, and to many other people. Lord, let me be pure in my mind and not think sexually immoral thoughts, but be filled with a holy desire only for my wife. And let me speak only the truth with total honesty, never trying to hide anything or deceive – even if the truth is uncomfortable to me.*

Jehovah has a rebuke for Shemaiah too: This man in exile had written a letter to Zephaniah (not the prophet) and to all the priests back in Judea (So Jeremiah, who lived in the priests' and Levites' city of Anatoth would have heard of it) saying that they should impeach Jehoiada, the rightful priest and take authority into their own hands and torture the true prophets. (Rebellion is the spirit of Satan's first sin, and whenever someone says to rebel against good authority ordained by God, then you can be sure that it is ungodly council!) Shemaiah pays special attention to Jeremiah in his letter, saying, in effect, "Why haven't you hushed that guy up yet?!"

Jeremiah's reply was, "This man is rebelling against God, so God will eradicate all his heirs, and his name will be no longer carried on." (Back then, this was a much more dreadful curse than it would be considered in my culture today.)

*O God, let me be totally submitted to You and not in the least bit rebellious.*

# Chapter 30

God tells Jeremiah to write all the prophesies in a book. Why? Because Israel will be restored from captivity. So, why the book? This is a record of prophesy and history. God wanted reconstructed Israel and all people afterwards to be able to see the book of Jeremiah and understand that God is just, that God's prophets should be listened to, that God is in control of history, and that God is true to His word. If anyone does not believe these things, just stick their nose in the book of Jeremiah!

Keeping a written account of God's work in our lives is a good thing. What a powerful inspiration a missionary biography is! And when I go back and read my old devotional journals, it is very refreshing. Last week I read through the time when I was considering marriage and a change of college majors and career. The record I had there of God's guidance and of what He did was a great testimony and encouragement to me as I undergo similar circumstances again concerning a job change and relocation. And this record is also something from which my children and others can learn.

Vs. 8 & 21 It is not ideal to have a leader who is not one of his people. A leader should "pledge his heart to draw near " to God.

vs. 5-7 & 11-15 Judah has sinned and deserves punishment. Sin must be punished or God isn't just and good. But Jeremiah doesn't dwell on this (He's already dwelt on it enough!); instead he focuses now on the coming restoration of God's people.

vs. 7b & 17-18 – God will "save" them out of their "trouble," "heal" them, and "have mercy."

v. 10 – God will provide salvation and restoration from exile.

vs. 11, 16, 23 – God will punish the nations which He had used to punish Judah.

vs. 14-15 – When we discipline our children, we should not go too easy on them if we are to follow God's example of discipline. We must be willing to use the rod of discipline to cause them pain when their sin is serious. But we must also follow God's example of restoration after discipline and let them know how much we love them. Have a definite end to the discipline, after which we should hug them and tell them we love them and rejoice that the punishment is over and that our relationship is restored and everything is OK.

vs. 18-19 This prophesy did indeed come true when Cyrus sent the exiles back to Judah and they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (and later the temple) and enjoyed peace and had a godly Jewish leader in Nehemiah. Even the prophecy of v.19 was explicitly fulfilled in Nehemiah 12:43 when the wall was built "and the sound of their rejoicing was heard far away"!

# Chapter 31

v.1 There will come a time when all of Israel will turn to God and they will be restored to God's blessing and to their land. Notice that the initiative is with God: He first decides He will once again be their God, then they will respond and be His people.

v.2 Perhaps this verse is like an old proverb, but God is promising that He will give rest and restoration to Israel. He specifically references the northern kingdom – Ephraim (vs. 6, 8, 9) which was captured by the northern nation of Assyria. The reason is given in v.3: because God has always loved them (and will always love them)!

*Lord, I praise You for Your everlasting love, that it doesn't come and go like ours does!*

v.4 God will restore their joy (v.13), their farm land (v.5), the temple (v.6), the people (v.8), their relationship with Him (through prayer and sonship - v.9),and their prosperity (vs. 12-14).

Notice the emphasis on proclaiming God to others:

- v.6 Watchmen will cry out, "Come, let us go… to the Lord our God."
- v.7 "Make your praises heard."
- v.10 "Hear the word of the LORD, O nations; proclaim it on distant coastlands…"
- v.12 "...Shout for joy on the heights…" (sure to catch the attention of many!)

Our relationship with God is reciprocal. He works in our hearts and becomes our God, and we respond to Him and become His people. He teaches us and opens our spiritual eyes, and we weep and pray. He does great things, and we proclaim it to the world. That's how we should be responding to Him.

*O Lord, please help me to be a better responder to You!*

vs. 15ff Jeremiah says that, although the people in Ramah wept because the Assyrians or Babylonians had killed and taken captive their children, God will restore the exiles to their land, and everything will be better after a time. YET, Matthew says in the New Testament (2:17) that this was a prophecy about King Herod killing all the babies in Bethlehem. Perhaps the utopian nature of the chapter, the phrases "in the later days" and "at that time," the fulfillment of the prophecy in Jesus' time in v.15, and the prophesy of a renewed covenant in v. 31, mean that the first half of the chapter is describing heaven (perhaps extending to the inauguration of the kingdom of heaven in the New Testament church. In fact,

Jeremiah even seems to extend the start of that renewed covenant to the reconstruction after the Babylonian exile.)

Looking back over this chapter, I am impressed with a few more verses that did not jump out at me at first:

- *v.9 Lord, "lead me with prayers"!*
- *v.12 Lord, let me "be radiant over the goodness of Jehovah"!*
- *V13 – Lord, help me to "rejoice from my affliction." Let me see hardship as a time of closeness to You and deliverance by You.*
- *v.14 – Inasmuch as I am, in a sense, in the role of a priest, please "fill my soul with fatness" – with wisdom and joy and closeness to You!*
- *O Lord, may I be like repentant Ephraim in vs. 18-19. Let me respond to Your chastisement, to turn when You direct me, to repent when I turn away, to kick myself when I am taught the stupidity of my sin, and to be ashamed and blush at the evil of my sin. I pray also that You would give my own children repentant hearts too!*
- *v.20 Lord, I praise You that You have adopted me as a son in Your kingdom and that You delight in me. You really enjoy the good things which You enable me to do. I also praise You because You never leave me, and even when You punish me, You Yourself groan too, and You have pity.*

v.21 Once again, we see that this restoration is a reciprocal effort contingent on the people's repentance. The point of this prophecy is not to say, "Hey, just relax; it'll get better soon." No, the point is to say, "Get right with God and start walking in His ways, and He will bless you."

How does one get right with God? Jeremiah says to make roadmarks and signs to guide them back to the old days when they walked with God. How do you make "roadsigns"? A roadmark is a guide that shows you that you're on the road.

- Getting a copy of the Bible and reading it is a way of having a guide to tell you if you're on the right road. If you have a Bible and don't read it, it's as good as walking aimlessly on a trail without ever consulting the trailmarks or maps! We must study the Bible for ourselves.
- Another way of getting roadmarks is getting advice from godly men and women who are familiar with the "Highway to Zion."
- Also, roadmarks, like the yellow and white lines on the sides of our highways, are BOUNDARIES marking the way in which you should go. We need to set boundaries for ourselves to help us walk in God's ways. We can set these boundaries by familiarizing ourselves with God's law and noticing when we start to sin. For instance, one boundary I try to practice is, since I

know I am low on self discipline, I try to avoid working or traveling alone, so I can have accountability from other people, or if I do a task alone, to make myself accountable to someone for that task. It helps me stay on the Highway. If I don't go out of my way to get this "roadmark," then I am bound to fall into sin.

*Dear God, help me to be consistent in reading Your word, talking to godly men, and setting boundaries for myself. Dear Father, I want to walk on the highway to Zion and never leave it! Let me not be like a faithless daughter/wife (v.22)! I praise You for how you "satisfy" the "weary" and "fill" the "sorrowful" (v.25). Your peace I wonderful; I need it!*

v.27-28 God will repopulate Israel with children and animals and bless them where once He had cursed them. It's interesting that even when God was curing Israel, however, He was still "watching over them"!

vs. 38-40 In this time of coming blessing for Israel, the city will be rebuilt, and the boundaries will be extended, and the people will realize that they and their city are <u>God's</u>. God will establish that city forever (v.40) and will not ever reject or tear down the "seed of Israel" (v.37). This is a description of the Church or the New Jerusalem. The Apostles explain in the New Testament books that Christians are the spiritual "seed of Israel," and spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham. This kingdom is forever, so it can't be speaking of a human political entity; the context is the New (or renewed) Covenant.

vs. 31-34 In the Old Testament, God treated people more like children, outlining all the rules and appearing frequently to guide them. He took the Israelites out of Egypt , and they broke His laws and covenant constantly (the Covenant of Works, which is, life conditioned upon our perfect obedience to God). A renewed covenant is mentioned in which the law is put <u>inside</u> His people, and it will be possible for all to know God personally, and forgiveness of in will be a cornerstone to the relationship. This is fulfilled in the New Testament ministry of the Holy Spirit, Who directs us in God's ways and Who gives Christians communion with God (rather than God just being close to Moses and Moses teaching the rest of God's people). Jesus Christ has become the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin, through Whom we have forgiveness of sin.

*God, I praise You for the forgiveness I have through Jesus, for the relationship I have with You, and for Your Holy Spirit!*

# Chapter 32

While Nebuchadnezzar's army raged about the siege walls of Jerusalem, Jeremiah kept right on prophesying, even though he was locked up in the guardhouse of the king's palace. Why did Zedekiah not want Jeremiah out fighting? I guess he didn't think Nebuchadnezzar would really win the siege, so he didn't want Jeremiah out among the people, disheartening them by telling them that they were going to lose! It must have been discouraging , on the one hand, to be locked up, but, I suppose it gave Jeremiah time alone with God. (*Lord, give me a good attitude and good time with You if I ever get locked up.)*

During this time, God tells Jeremiah that his cousin will offer Jeremiah his field.

I always wonder when a prophesy is more embellished that the actual words quoted. All God said was that Hanameel would offer Jeremiah land, but Jeremiah took it to mean that God wanted him to buy it and tell everyone that land would again be useful when God restores His people. Probably God told Jeremiah more than was recorded in verse 7.

It was quite an act of faith for Jeremiah to buy land! It really showed that he believed his message that restoration would come. I don't know where he came up with the money to buy a field; I imagine that the economy was haywire at that point. Perhaps people who believed Jeremiah's prophecies were selling their land cheap because they though they'd never see it again. I suppose with all the witnesses Jeremiah had for that land deal, his heirs would have been able to pick right up on farming when they returned from exile!

vs. 17-25 What a beautiful prayer of praise! Yet chillingly frank about God's justice. *Nothing is too difficult for You! You are the Creator of everything. You act with lovingkindness to thousands and repay sinful men (and their children). You are The Great and Mighty God, Jehovah of Hosts, great in counsel and mighty in work.*

Jeremiah emphasizes the fact that God brings just punishment upon evildoers. He makes it clear that God gave Judah their land and that He is taking it away because of their disobedience to Him.

- v.23 They did not obey His voice or walk in His law.
- vs. 29, 34-35 They courted other gods.
- v.30 They did evil things.
- v.33 They turned their backs to God, not listening to Him.

*O God, help me to act on what I believe, just like Jeremiah did. Give me a heart of praise to You and a courage to tell people around me about Your justice. O Lord,*

*let neither me nor my children ever be rebellious to You like Judah was. Let us love You only, fervently, and not turn aside to anything or anybody else! Let us turn to You, seek Your face, listen intently to You, and obey You, walking according to Your law and righteousness!!*

vs. 37-43 Ah, but when we truly are God's people and He is our God, He gives us unity that we may fear Him more and single-heartedly obey Him. *Lord, I praise You for Your covenant of love to me and my family. I praise You that You have put the fear of You in our hearts and that we never will depart from You!*

v.41 *You do not just maintain Your people; You REJOICE over us and You love to do good things for us! Thank You, Lord, that we are not on our own, but that we have You as our God and that You really enjoy doing favors for us! You truly are a great and wonderful God!*

# Chapter 33

v.2 Interesting that the Hebrew text doesn't explicitly say what it is that Jehovah "made," "formed," and "established;" the object in each case is just the pronoun "her." (Less-literal English translations reasonably supply the feminine noun "the earth.") We are brought back to God's first act in our world: His creation of it!And when you think of Jehovah doing this, it really tends to put Him in perspective of Who He is, doesn't it?

*God, I praise You for Your amazing creation. Your beauty, intelligence, complexity, purity, and creativity displayed on this earth boggle my mind. You are awesome!*

v.3 God desires responsiveness from His people. When we see His creation, we should call upon Him in worship and prayer and trust. He is allowing the Chaldeans to besiege Jerusalem for the very reason that they have not called upon Him. We must be aware of His presence all day (and night) long, calling upon Him often. It should be our first response when we are excited or concerned about something He has allowed to happen, be it a particularly beautiful cloud formation, a letter from a friend, a catastrophe heard on the news, or a person you pass by. *Dear God, let me call upon You.*

And God is responsive to our response; this is the essence of a true relationship. God does things for us, we respond to Him, and He responds back. "I will answer you and tell you great things that cannot be seen or known otherwise." How can they understand in their rebellious hearts that the exile is God's discipline and that He plans to restore them?

v.8 How can we fathom God's forgiveness and mercy? But He desires it for His people. The exile was for the purpose of turning His people's hearts from their rebellion so they could once again be in fellowship with Him. That relationship is what He desires.

*Dear God, I praise You for Your forgiveness – that You do indeed cleanse me and pardon me for all the iniquity, sin, and rebellion I confess to You. You are… I run out of strong enough words to describe how wonderful You are. Marvelous….*

v.9 And when God restores His people in forgiveness, what response does He desire from us? We will give Him great joy when we tell all the nations of the earth about His glory. What then? Let their (the nations') response be to fear God. This is the way it should be! Each of us responding to each of God's blessings! *Lord, let Your church become responsive to You, even as You outline it here!*

When God's people recognize Him for Who He is and call upon Him, He responds with forgiveness. When we respond to His forgiveness by telling others about Him, He blesses us with fullness in our lives (v.11), restoration, often material blessings,

and godly, healthy families. In turn, we should respond with praise and thanksgiving.

v.13 Our vocational work is also part of our Christian life; it receives God's blessings too. Notice that these things parallel the process of becoming a Christian, as well as the functions of the church (the people of God).

Verses 15-16 speak of the Messiah – the righteous Man, the Branch (cf. Isaiah 11:1), the descendant of David, the miracle-worker, and the Savior, who will make Jerusalem (His people – now the church) dwell in safety. Jesus has indeed become our Righteousness by taking our sins upon Him and imputing His righteousness to us to that we can have forgiveness of sin and right relationship with God!

v.17 Since Jesus became the final sacrifice by dying for our sins, and since He has ascended into heaven, we have a King and High Priest ruling and ministering from heaven, and He will never be cut off. The one sacrifice of Jesus' life can be applied continually to all the sins I will ever do, while He rules over His people – not only the physical house of Israel (the Jews), but also the spiritual house of Israel (all on earth who have joined the household by believing in Jehovah and His Messiah Jesus).

*I praise you, Jesus for this! Vs. 19-22 You have thus kept Your promise to David and to Abraham.*

God is prophetically building the case that the exile will end and there will once again be a nation of Israel with Jewish rulers and priests. God has not forgotten His promises (He never will!) any more than He will forget to let the sun rise each morning.

# Chapter 34

Why did God have Jeremiah repeat this message so many times to Zedekiah, that King Nebuchadnezzar would indeed win and take Zedekiah into captivity? Perhaps Zedekiah was somewhat faithful?

- v.5 says people would mourn his death,
- v.8 says he freed the Hebrew slaves,
- and he must have believed that God would save Judah from the Chaldeans – it was a misguided belief, but still a sort of trust in God.

Whatever the case, Jeremiah may have been getting tired of delivering this same message over and over to his king, but Jeremiah was faithful to obey God, even when he may have felt God was asking him to do something foolish or useless.

Perhaps the message (that this attack from the Chaldeans was indeed God's punishment for Judah's rebellion against Him) got through to Zedekiah to some extent, convincing the king to take a step in the direction of obeying the law by freeing the slaves (v.14). Perhaps it was a sabbath year when the law required slaves to be freed, or perhaps there was some other, not-so-pious reason why they wanted their slaves freed, such as needing more men for the army?

Oh, how I wish that my people would observe the sound economic policies that God set up for Israel. Freeing slaves every 7 years, loaning money without interest, and absolving debts every 70 years kept out the problems of permanently-depressed classes and eternally-rising inflation. Why can't we do that? I suppose it's not in the interest of those in power. It would require giving away things they paid good money for and worked hard to obtain (yet which, in God's economy, could - and should - be released).

v.16 But for some reason, the slave-owners re-enslaved their freedmen! Did the former slave-owners go through the city, capturing back their slaves and hauling them home kicking and screaming, or did the slaves voluntarily come back because their former masters had not helped them get established in the free economy (as God's law commanded), so during the siege there was no other way for them to feed themselves?

God is upset, and rightfully so, not so much that they had slaves (God's law condemned kidnapping, but not slavery), but that the people reneged on an oath/covenant. It is easy to condemn those slave-owners until we realize how unfaithful we ourselves are to our God – how often we fall back into sin we vowed we'd never do again. God is seriously upset over this.

# Chapter 35

When God tells Jeremiah to take the Rechabites (an Israelite family) into the temple and feed them wine, Jeremiah does so without question. The fact that Jeremiah knew the family members by name indicates that he might have known that the Rechabites didn't drink wine, but he obeyed God, no matter how strange the command. (Why does he go into such detail to describe which room in the temple he took them to?)

But the Rechabites refused to drink the wine Jeremiah served. They recited the command of their forefather Jonadab, who had commanded his children to live a nomadic lifestyle and not drink wine either. That must have limited their careers to shepherding or retail – or maybe finance or small-scale, home-based trades. This dramatic setup gives God (and Jeremiah) an opportunity to hold up the Rechabites as an example of faithfulness to their vows – especially in front of the unfaithful priests and Levites in the temple.

Why does God hold up examples to us? To a rebellious heart, it increases the rebellion to hear an authority single out someone to give them praise. But to a heart that is really open to God and striving to please Him, it encourages the struggle for holiness when we see someone else's good example and see that we are not alone and that God "is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6).

*O God, I praise You for Your patience – that You send us warnings and encouragements to obey You instead of just smiting us immediately for all our disobediences (which You have every right to do). Keep my heart (and the hearts of my descendants) open to You and striving to please You! I pray that Your blessing upon the Rechabites might be upon my family, that there will always be men in my family who stand with You!*

# Chapter 36

V.2 sounds very much like the second verse of ch. 30. Jeremiah had to write down all his prophecies two times. Seems like we've jumped back in time perhaps 2 decades from Jer. 33 to Jer. 36 – the timeline seems to skip around a bit. Jeremiah is "restricted" (v.5), so perhaps we are back to when Pashur put Jeremiah in stocks in chapter 20. At any rate, it has to do with the unpopularity of Jeremiah's prophecies.

Jeremiah got Baruch (which means "he blessed") to take dictation, and Jeremiah recounted all of his prophesies to him. Why? Perhaps Baruch was better-trained in scribal art than Jeremiah, or perhaps Jeremiah's eyesight was getting bad, or perhaps it was because the plan was for Baruch to read it out loud himself afterward, or perhaps it was just easier for them this way. To remember and write down 23 years worth of prophecy (25:1-3) – the first 25 chapters of Jeremiah – and to make sure it was all spelled correctly must have taken several days at least.

But now, they have a way to do prophetic ministry unhampered by Jeremiah's confinement; Baruch can deliver Jeremiah's prophecies to the outside world! So Baruch goes to the temple during a big religious holiday and starts reading this book – the Book of Jeremiah – out loud.

V.7 tells us what our object should always be – especially for those with prophetic gifting: the object is repentance, not judgment. Wherever we give a message to someone, it must be our eager desire that they will turn away from sin and be reconciled to God, no matter how unlikely the prospect. We also are reminded of all the times that the book of the Law was read to the people of Israel in that very temple and how oftentimes Israel had repented. There is great worth in reading God's word and reading it to others. God's word if very powerful because it is the truth.

V.11 Micaiah didn't merely get a synopsis – he didn't stay for only part of the reading like our news reporters do nowadays. He was interested in the message, so he listened to the whole thing.

Why did this book-reading cause such a stir? Perhaps it was passages like Chapter 22, where God really calls out King Jehoiakim. Perhaps the people knew that Jehoiakim was an evil king, yet were afraid of him. What courage it must have taken for Jeremiah and Baruch to speak so boldly against the king!

Jehoiakim was not amused. He burned the manuscript and sent soldiers to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. But the Lord took care of His servants and hid them. If we are like the king's servants in v.24 and fear man rather than God, then we are cursed. But if we fear God more than man, like Jeremiah and Baruch, then God is pleased with us and will often protect us from frightening men.

Now then, what would the proper response of Jeremiah be? Would he be like Jonah and say, “Praise God for protecting me! Now, God, just burn up this city and justice will be served!” No, he was disappointed that the people and the king did not repent! Was he frustrated to the point of giving up? No, he sat down again at God’s command and re-wrote his book!

# Chapter 37

This chapter goes back to the time mentioned back in chapter 32. Nebuchadnezzar was laying siege to Jerusalem when he heard that the Egyptian army was coming up to confront him. He ran his army south to meet the Egyptians and left Jerusalem alone for a time. While there was relative peace, Jeremiah surveyed some land in the tribe of Benjamin. God had told him to buy it, so he was going out to look at it. When he came back into Jerusalem, the guard at the gate put two and two together:

- Jeremiah had the inside scoop on the future and would be a real asset to any army,
- Jeremiah had met with the king of Judah and other high officials, so he probably knew sensitive information about Judah,
- Jeremiah clearly predicted that the Chaldeans would win over Jerusalem, so he must be more sympathetic to Babylon than to his own nation,
- And now, Jeremiah was returning from the same direction that the Chaldean army had just gone.
- Jeremiah must be a spy!

This time Ahikam (26:24) wasn't able to save Jeremiah. Jeremiah was unjustly tried, beaten, and jailed. What a predicament – everyone thought he was a spy; how could he justify himself in their eyes? Everything he did would just be misinterpreted and would make them more suspicious. He had done nothing wrong – he had simply obeyed God in starting the process of buying a piece of land. Now, all he had for obeying God was a growling stomach, a runny nose from the dankness of the dungeon, and pain in his back so fierce from the beating that it hurt to move even the smallest bit.

*Why God? Why do You let Your servants suffer? I guess it's not our place to ask.*

Even though Zedekiah was a wicked king, and even though the people of Jerusalem thoroughly deserved to be destroyed, Jeremiah did not seek God's face to get them punished; rather he kept praying for their salvation (and God acknowledges this in v.7). But it is clearly God's plan to use the Chaldean army to destroy Jerusalem.

Now, if the people had listened to Jeremiah's message and repented, they (just like the Ninevites in Jonah's day) would not have gotten punished after all. But this is not the case here (v.2). And the whole point of Jeremiah's buying the land was a sign of the future favor of the Lord on His people – there was hope amid Jeremiah's prophecies of doom.

From the dungeon, Jeremiah is summoned to the king himself – this was a great honor and a great opportunity! Jeremiah could have "prophesied" that Egypt would destroy Nebuchadnezzar and thus win the king's favor and thus get out of prison. But instead of considering his own circumstances, Jeremiah was faithful to deliver the very unwelcome message which God really gave him. He must have realized that the king would get mad and maybe have him beaten again – or worse, but Jeremiah wasn't in this for himself. He does, however, remind King Zedekiah that, of all the "prophets" in the kingdom, he alone had correctly prophesied that Babylon would lay siege to Jerusalem, then he laid his case before the king that he was innocent of being a spy. The king must have had a little bit of fear of God left in him (or maybe God was turning his heart for Jeremiah's sake), and they put Jeremiah in the guardhouse court and saw that he got fed. This was more comfortable, although it still kept Jeremiah from being able to personally deliver all of his messages.

From the guardhouse, he didn't forget God's command that started all this, so, as we saw in chapter 32, he closed the deal on the land. He also seems to have made a special friend in Baruch, who closed the deal in chapter 32 and wrote down the prophecies and delivered them in chapter 36. Perhaps Jeremiah was discipling this man, even as the apostle Paul discipled men from prison...

# Chapter 38

I like the meaning of the name Pashur – "free." Apparently it wasn't an uncommon name in the Old Testament. Two men by that name are mentioned in the first verse: the first is the priest that confined Jeremiah in stocks in chapter 20, and the second is the prince who carried Jeremiah's message to the king in chapter 21, hoping that Jerusalem would be saved by God and not get destroyed by the Chaldeans.

Jeremiah's message sounds like a last-ditch opportunity to obey God. God is saying, "Fight the Chaldeans and you die; surrender and you will live." Obeying God and surrendering would be so simple and in their self-interest. But they were still so proud and rebellious that they wouldn't even obey God when He gave them this last chance to obey Him. The officials were so perverted in their thinking that they accused Jeremiah of "seeking the… harm" of Jerusalem when he was actually seeking their well-being!

The "princes" of my country also say that it is harmful for my people not to abort their unborn babies and that it is in our best interest to raise taxes, and they accuse rational, God-fearing Christians of harming the country, when, in fact, we have God's answers. We must not give up, but persevere in bearing God's messages, even in the face of impossibility, just like Jeremiah, that we may be counted faithful to the end.

Here is a very dangerous man – a king who is not in control! Zedekiah was intimidated by his advisors to allow them to hurt Jeremiah, even though he knew that Jeremiah was right. (Why else would he have conferred with Jeremiah later?) The king put no controls on what his officials did; he should have at least told them to report back what they did or submit a plan of what they would to to Jeremiah. The king was downright scared of his own officials – he met in secret with Jeremiah for fear that the officials would find out. He was operating out of fear of what others might do to him rather than doing what was right. He was more concerned for himself than for his charges (v.19). He was also wishy-washy – he allowed men to both hurt and help Jeremiah; he knew Jeremiah was right, but he didn't follow God's command through Jeremiah; he was influenced by what even his concubines thought of him, and he told Jeremiah to tell lies. This is a very poor example of a leader.

A Christian leader should use checks and balances – never give unlimited power to anybody. We should not care about what wicked men think of us and should never allow wicked men to be advisors or delegates. We should be consistent in doing what's right and not vacillate with every wind, but stand up for what's right, no matter what everyone else thinks or does. And a Christian leader should never have to cover up any actions with lies.

It wasn't even an Israelite who saved Jeremiah from the cistern; it was a eunuch from Ethiopia! Ebed-Melek went through the proper procedures (Eccl. 8:6) to rescue Jeremiah; he called wickedness "wickedness," not glossing over it, and he showed compassion – not just compulsory compassion; he even took care to pad the ropes to lift Jeremiah out. Notice also that through his influence, the king did something right (v.10): the king exercised proper control over the delegation of authority and commanded a good thing to be done.

*O God, let me and my children be heroes like Ebed-Melek! Let us expose evil, be law-abiding citizens, show true compassion towards others, and influence our political leaders to do what is right!*

# Chapter 39

It was not long before King Nebuchadnezzar returned and sacked Jerusalem. What manxome[3] names the Chaldean officials had: Nergalsarezer and the Rab-Mag!

Again, Zedekiah and his officials were wrong. They fled for their own lives and abandoned the sacred responsibility they had to watch over the people in the city of Jerusalem. They were selfish in seeking to escape. And God used the Chaldeans to punish King Zedekiah severely.

All of Jeremiah's prophesies about the destruction of Jerusalem came true. Yet even in the midst of the carnage, God saved His faithful ones, including Ebed-Melech, Baruch (43:3), and Jeremiah. How did King Nebuchadnezzar know Jeremiah was different from the other Jewish leaders? Maybe God told him directly, or maybe it was just the fact that his soldiers found Jeremiah in prison, beat up pretty badly by Zedekiah's officials. But ultimately, why were they saved? God says it was "because you have trusted in me."

*Dear God, I trust in You . Let me fully obey You and keep trusting You like Ebed-Melech and Jeremiah did, and let me never become a selfish leader like Zedekiah.*

3 This is a word invented by Lewis Caroll to describe the monster in his poem "Jabberwocky."

# Chapter 40

Apparently, the Chaldean soldiers were taking all the Judean captives to Ramah (part of the fulfillment of 31:15ff) and deporting them to Babylon from there. The captain of the bodyguard of the Chaldean army must have been a very big, very strong, and very intelligent individual. Why he took a fancy to Jeremiah is beyond me – except that he had obviously heard Jeremiah's prophecy and he perhaps had observed Jeremiah's influence on the Jews as he went around, encouraging the Jews to cooperate and submit to the Chaldeans. But what's great is that this man, Nebuzzaradan, had come to know about God and confess God's deeds among the Jews!

*Lord, I pray that through my faithfulness to obey You, men like Nebuzzaradan may come to know You!*

Anyway, Nebuzzaradan freed Jeremiah from the concentration/deportation camp in Ramah and basically said that Jeremiah could do anything he wanted – go to Babylon under his care, join the Jews remaining in Judah, or go somewhere else on his own. Jeremiah chose to join the Jewish remnant in Jerusalem.

The really poor Jews whom the Chaldean army chose to leave behind were put under the governance of a Jew named Gedaliah, who was loyal to King Nebuchadnezzar. As word spread that there was a community of Jews left in Jerusalem, other Jews who had gone into hiding or had left the country returned to join the community.

The army commanders have Jewish-sounding names, and it mentions their fathers, as though they could be traced in Jewish ancestry, but if they were Jewish army soldiers, how did they go unnoticed by the Chaldean army which surely would have routed out and killed them (or at least taken them captive). Perhaps they had been hiding out in caves or something and were among the returnees. These Jewish soldiers had to be admonished to serve (rather than fight) the Chaldeans, and be farmers (rather than soldiers). They are afraid of what the Chaldeans will do to them and they need Gedalaiah's assurance of "standing for [them] before the Chaldeans."

In some ways, we are spiritually like those Jewish soldiers, torn between allegiances to two kingdoms. It is against our nature to be submissive to God, so God taught the Jews to submit to Him through the force of the Chaldean army. We often would rather fight God and run from Him than submit and settle down into the paths He wants us to take. But, somewhat like the rebel Jews had Gedaliah as an advocate for them before the "King of Kings" in Babylon, we have an "advocate" – Jesus Christ the Righteous – who "stands for us" before God the Father in heaven! And, if the analogy can be extended, we see the advocate

Gedaliah put to death, and our righteous and rightful ruler Jesus also was put to death by the hands of unjust men.

Throughout history, the Ammonites, located East of the Jordan from Jerusalem, have been a thorn in the side of the Jews, although there have been times of relative peace between them. (They were later involved in the plot to halt the building of the temple in the Reconstruction.)

# Chapter 41

It almost seems like they did things out of spite and jealousy. It is easy to see how the Ammonite king could have persuaded an ex-army officer and a member of the royal family to kill off Gedaliah and everyone else who would threaten Ismael's chance at being the military ruler over the remnant of the Jews. With only 10 men to help, though, he must have been quite a warrior to kill off the entire court and bodyguard of Gedaliah, as well as the whole Chaldean contingent left to occupy the area!

The next day, a bunch of men from towns around central Israel appeared on the scene. Were they soldiers returning from war, survivors of the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom, or more recent settlers of another ancestry? I get the impression that they are perhaps Jews because they have offerings for the true God and they know Gedaliah. But they must have been around for a while to have gathered stores of food. Whatever the case, Ismael lied to them (Perhaps by saying, "Come <u>to</u> me – I am Gedaliah, the ruler of the place," or "Come <u>with</u> me, and I'll take you to see Gedaliah."), and he killed them too.

A usurper is ruled by fear. He must dispose of everyone who might threaten him, and that means murder on a horrific level. Someone like that should be stopped before he makes the coup in the first place. What I don't understand is why Gedaliah did not believe his advisors on this. Well, Johannan knew all along, and he showed up just in time to stop Ismael from deporting what was left of the Jews to Ammon. Ismael especially wanted the king's daughters (v.10 - sex and violence went together with him), while good Johannan lists <u>all</u> the different people saved (v.16).

But now, everybody was scared of King Nebuchadnezzar's reaction. They didn't understand much about the Chaldeans and their culture. They perceived the Chaldeans as bloodthirsty warriors who were always fierce and ruthless. They might not understand if Johannan tried to explain that Ismael and the Ammonites were responsible for all of the havoc – especially the slaughter of governor Gedaliah. As far as they were concerned, the Chaldeans might just kill first and ask questions later. So they did what Israel had done so many times in the past: they looked to Egypt for help – that "reed that pierces you when you lean on it" (2 Kings 18:21). They turned to Egypt instead of to God.

*How stubborn can we be in our rebellion?! O God, melt my heart. I don't want to be stubborn against You; I want to turn to You, be submissive to You, and do what is right and good – that which pleases You.*

# Chapter 42

Why do the Jews say "the Lord <u>your</u> God" to Jeremiah (vs. 2-3)? Do they not think that Jehovah is their God? Is Jeremiah gently reminding them in v.4 that the Lord <u>is</u> their God, whether or not they acknowledge Him? I think so, for they respond in v.6, calling Him, "the Lord <u>our</u> God" as they pledge obedience to Him.

*Dear God, please use me to remind people (as Jeremiah did) of their God, and use me to bring other people to the point of calling you, "the LORD our God."*

So Jeremiah sits and waits. A week goes by, and still no message from the Lord. Some of the people may have wondered if God had left them and was no longer their God. Perhaps they grew impatient and started making plans of their own. Why did God wait 10 days? He could have answered immediately.

*God, Your timing is perfect and purposeful. Time is not a hindrance or a pressure to You because You are not in time, experiencing it or being influenced by it. God, give us patience to wait on Your timing and Your responses!*

Finally Jeremiah gets the message, and it is clear: "Settle back down in Israel; serve Babylon, and God will bless. Run away to Egypt, and every one of you will die from war, sickness, or hunger. Do Not Go To Egypt!"

How could they mistake it? How could they rebel against such a clear message? But God knew that, in their hearts, they already were not panning to obey that message.

*Well, God, I see the point. I am just like rebellious Israel. There is an area of my life that I know is wrong - and for which I am well aware of Your curses, yet, even as I pray to You, I still make my mind up to sin. I am as stupid and damnable as those confounded Israelites, and my spirit screams with frustration… I have a will that can choose to obey or disobey You. Somehow, You also are a God who predestines and rules the entire universe, but You work with and through the factor of our wills. Sometimes, I wish You would just make me a robot to do right.*

*God, my country is falling apart, too. We see the evil things our government does: illegal taxation, irresponsible borrowing, licentiousness among politicians, widespread denial of You, government support of obscenity, immoral business practices, untruths propagated by the media, oppression, one-world government encroachment by the United Nations, murder of unborn children, people developing abominable alternatives to the God-ordained family unit, etc. God, we are in deep sin! Will my country even last through the next decade? Are we going to be persecuted for being Christians? Are we doomed to the same fate as Israel was for its disobedience? I feel like throwing up my hands in despair and running away – it seems so hopeless. Is there anything that can be done? I can't fight on all the fronts at once – pro-life, lower taxes, resisting rewriting the Constitution, anti-*

*obscenity, pro family, pro-evangelism... There's too much to do. And what about the costs? Is refusing to pay taxes worth losing my job over? Is spanking my child worth risking him being kidnapped by the DHS? Is demonstrating against abortion clinics with Operation Rescue worth getting beaten up by the police (as they tend to do in our town) and thrown in jail? Is standing up for what's right worth getting smeared by the media and being made a spectacle of? How many of these good causes do I adopt? I'm scared to do these things because of the devastation which the evil world system can wreak on me and my family if I do. Are these issues big enough to risk those consequences? I would rather be persecuted and/or killed over the clear-cut issue of my faith, like Paul was beaten and stoned for preaching the Gospel. I'd rather it be over a basic issue like that, if I have to be persecuted. But it looks like it won't be so easy. Should I really even be involved in faith-based ministry at this time? How likely is it that I'll be able to live in this position for another decade? Okay, enough of this. You are still my God, and I will keep doing the things You have led me to do so far. I won't run away from my commitments; I will be faithful, and I will trust You to be faithful to guide me into anything new and different that You want me to do.*

# Chapter 43

Johannan was a force to be reckoned with! He had survived the Chaldean attack without being captured, had intelligence sources that predicted Ismael's attack, and was able to defeat Ismael in battle. He was independent and strong-willed, and he wanted to help rule the people. He was a man who acted in his own strength without concern for God's word and God's people, and he wanted to strike out on His own instead of working in community with the people. This is a dangerous sort of leader.

How does a prophet live without going insane? Jeremiah has spoken his part, and he knows that this is a life-or-death situation, yet the people choose disobedience and therefore death. I would be getting hysterical. When we see all the evil in our land and see the judgment of God coming and see that people don't care, what is the proper godly response? Public mourning? Hoping and praying for mercy and revival? Escaping? Trying to keep plugging away to change the hearts of ungodly men just to be faithful to God's call – even though you know it won't change anything? Depending on the circumstances, any of these might be a good response.

We don't see much hope now in Jeremiah's heart. He doesn't seem to be asking God for grace and revival anymore; it's too late for that. And he doesn't escape by telling the people to leave him there in Judah when they go to Egypt. He takes a position of public mourning, and he sticks faithfully with the people to keep delivering God's messages to them as their prophet.

*Lord help us to do this in our own culture today!*

Once again, Israel and Egypt collide in a calamity. Why is every Biblical account of Jews and Egyptians centered around a conflict? (Lies and adultery in the case of Abraham and Isaac, Famine in the case of Jacob and his sons, Injustice and famine in the case of Joseph, Slavery and plagues in the case of Moses, and now War in the case of Jeremiah) Egypt's gods will once again be proven impotent as King Nebuchadnezzar destroys Egypt. The true and Living God has predestined each man's life and death (v.11), and He is the true Lord over all the earth.

# Chapter 44

The expatriate Judeans in Egypt were worshiping Egyptian gods – the very gods Jehovah had devastated some thousand years previous at the Exodus! How can they be so stubborn when God says again and again, "Oh, do not do this abominable thing which I hate!" – even after they see God's judgment on their sin? Yet I am stubborn in sin too.

*O God, when you remind me, "Oh, do not do this…," how can I sin when I know it's wrong and I will reap consequences? If I am frustrated with myself, how much more so are You, Holy God! I want to do right when I am tempted. I want to hear Your voice reminding me; I want to be an obedient son to You. So help me, God."*

So, what is it that God wants? (v.10)

- A contrite heart (humble, sorry for sin, repentant),
- Fear of God's law (including studying it),
- and Walking in God's law (obedience, not only personally, but also as a family).

*O God, this is what I want too! Please enable me to be contrite, to fear You, and to walk in Your ways and to teach my family to do the same.*

Jeremiah prophesies the annihilation of the Jews in Egypt again, with the object of getting them to repent, even as Nineveh did in Jonah's day. But they say, "We are not going to heed you." Oh, what a slap in the face to Jeremiah – and to God Himself. (That's something you don't get away with!) Jeremiah tried to explain that God's wrath, exhibited by the Chaldean takeover and exile, was a result of their burning sacrifices to the Egyptian gods, but the people would not listen. When viewed from a logical standpoint, our own arguments justifying our own sin are just as blind and stupid as the argument those Jews gave to justify their worship of false gods!

My greatest false god is my own self. I am so willing to ignore the self-discipline of God's law to bring temporary selfish pleasures to myself, and it is just as wrong as burning incense to the "Queen of heaven."

"Go ahead," says God, "Go ahead and worship those gods, but I will no longer be called by you again; I will do my best to harm you, and you will all die here. I'll give you a sign too: Pharaoh Hophra, King of Egypt, will be captured by the Chaldeans, just like King Zedekiah of Judah was." What a horror to hear God say, "I am watching over you for harm and not for good!" That is scary!

*O God, please help me to walk in Your ways, and let me always have a healthy fear of Your wrath. It is all-too-easy to get flippant and casual about sin like everybody else around me (both in- and out-side the church).*

# Chapter 45

Skip back in time a bit to when Jeremiah was just starting his "career" as prophet – the first time God told him to start writing his prophecies down. (Perhaps ch. 30 also coincides with this time.) Baruch is a faithful aid to Jeremiah throughout his ministry, and God has a special message for Baruch at the commencement of his service to Jeremiah. This is not at all like the sort of pep talk you'd expect an employer to give a new worker, but this is the message God gives Baruch through Jeremiah:

"You think things are bad now? Just wait 'till I get finished destroying Israel by the Chaldeans. You are My servant and the helper of a godly man (i.e. Jeremiah), but don't get delusions of grandeur. Serving God is only for humble, faithful men; it is not a glamorous position. Yet I will reward you for your faithfulness to me. Although I am going to kill and exile everyone in Israel to other lands, I will spare your life and protect you."

Would that all full-time ministers could be given this sermon before they embark in ministry! The work of ministry is usually humiliating, thankless, not fun, not easy. When in full-time ministry, God usually seems to make sure that little more than our basic needs are met and that our lives are preserved. There is little wealth and power for ministers who are truly and wholeheartedly serving God - especially for those in a prophetic role.

*Lord, let me have that attitude which You had when You became man (Phil. 2) – humbleness, not aspiring to greatness, thankfulness that my basic needs are met, faithfulness in plugging away at difficult and thankless tasks, and willingness to obey You, even when everything seems to be going from bad to worse – even when I know that what You'd have me say will make people angry at me.*

# Chapter 46

God proclaims to the Chaldeans the downfall of the Egyptian army.

v.5 Jeremiah asks, “Why have I seen it?” Sometimes it is difficult for a prophet to understand why God show him things and why nobody else sees and understands.

v.10 “That day belongs to the Lord…” Each day is the LORD’s, and, no matter who looks like they’re in charge, it is God who is really calling the shots. And when it comes to vengeance, that is the LORD’s department too! Christians are not to be a vengeful people who seek to get back at those who wrong us. God is our avenger, and when God is our avenger, we can be secure in the knowledge that full justice will be done.

v.14 Can you imagine standing with Jeremiah in the four big cities of Egypt with this message? How often was he “boo-ed” at and laughed at? This message would make some people angry – poking fun at the mighty men of Egypt and at the powerful businessmen, calling them clumsy, easily-defeated, quick-to-retreat, and “fatted calves.” This did not endear him to his listeners, yet Jeremiah went ahead and delivered the message.

And God makes it clear that He is the One in control:

- v.15 “The LORD has thrust them down”
- v.18 God is the KING
- v.21 This is “their time of punishment”
- v.25 “I am going to punish…”
- v.26 “I will give them over to … Nebuchadnezzar…”

A hint is given as to the cause of this punishment in v. 25 – her gods and those who trust in Pharaoh.

Now the tone changes suddenly to that of a tender, loving Father. I think that verses 27-28 are speaking to the whole of Israel, especially to those who are God’s servants: “Do not fear; do not be dismayed.”

This is what I need to hear, because it is so easy to give into fear and despair at the situation in which I live – an ungodly country which, like Egypt, deserves divine punishment. Even though the economy will crash and I may find it difficult to get employment, even though I may even get arrested by the police for obeying God, even though my country may be overrun by a more powerful government and we lose even more of our freedoms, EVEN SO, “Do not fear, my servant,” says the LORD.

This prophecy did come true for Israel, and they were established again as a country 70 years later. And nothing is left of Babylon. Likewise, I believe that "the end of all things is near" (1 Pet. 4:7) for us, and we will see Christians established in God's heavenly kingdom, and we will see the godless, worldly systems – in whatever political forms they take – made an end-of by the great King of all Kings.

And yet, look at the little couplet at the very end. It reminds me of Hebrews 12:5-11. It is the mark of a legitimate son to be disciplined by God.

*O God, give me grace to receive Your discipline and grow to be a more Godly man who is walking ever more closely to Your Word.*

*Our country is in such sick shape! We expect to pay about half of our income in taxes this year (and we're in one of the lowest income tax brackets there is!), and the newly-elected President is going to favor Congressional bills that further increase our taxes! The people of my country are so duped by what the entertainment and news media say; they have left Your ways and are totally distracted from what is important and are following ways of foolishness and wickedness. I've got just enough sensitivity from You that I can't blend in with this culture and accept its ways… I can see wrong and want to speak out against it, but I have no direct messages from You like the Biblical prophets did, and I have no platform to speak from. Am I just getting too wrapped up in Jeremiah? I don't covet the position of a prophet, but, even though I don't think I'll enjoy it, I feel compelled. Lord, give me messages and I'll do it. Otherwise change my heart. I guess I'm still not clear on Your calling on my life; what do You want me to do? I want to do Your will, so please make it clear to me.*

# Chapter 47

A true prophet is not provincially-minded. Jeremiah is NOT saying, “My God is going to whup up on you! We hate your guts and are glad you’re going to be destroyed.” No, look at how much of the chapter is a truly empathetic look at what will happen to these people – it mostly dwells on the reactions of the Philistines to God’s judgment, so we feel pity for those who are punished by God.

I get the picture of a father spanking his child. The father has spanked the child one lick, and the child is crying. The father truly feels pity for his child. He loves his child, and the child’s cries go right to his heart, but he knows he must finish the spanking – another couple of licks, because he knows he must be fair and consistent.

*O God, You are so compassionate! It is beyond me how You can love us so much when we are so sinful. And it is further beyond me that You feel compassion and pity for the heathen, despite how incredibly offensive they are to You!*

Jeremiah makes it clear that the LORD will be the prime mover in this judgment; his message says nothing about the might of Pharaoh; we just know it, perhaps because Baruch inserted the first verse to give us a little context to the message.

Tyre, Sidon, Ashkelton, and Gaza are all city-states along the Mediterranean coast of Israel (the Levant). Throughout Israel’s Biblical history, Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities to the North, and Ashkelton and Gaza were Philistine cities to the South. Caphtor is Crete, the big island in the Mediterranean, easily accessible by boat from those coastal cities. The Philistines moved from the area of Crete to the coast of Israel at the beginning of Israel’s history, and the Phoenicians in Tyre and Sidon focused their economy on sea-trade throughout the Mediterranean.

*Got a letter from my former supervisor from Inter Varsity Mission Fellowship, explaining his perspective of the demise of the IVMF regional staff ministry, and it is not pretty. He sounds rather bitter about it all, and that surprises me, because he is one of those people who can see the good side of everything - one of the most gracious, diplomatic men I know... I also got word from my church, where I’ve been a member for 6.5 years, saying that they don’t feel it is their “priority” to financially support our new ministry with Caleb Project. That really rankles me; our own home church doesn’t even care enough to explain why they won’t support the ministry You called us to! God, I am so tempted to become bitter. But bitterness is not a fruit of the Spirit, and I have seen how it destroys other people, and I don’t want to go that route. But what is the proper response?*

# Chapter 48

This prophecy concerns the people of Moab, a small country to the East of Israel. The Biblical book of Ruth is about a Moabite woman who became a follower of Jehovah about 5 centuries previous to this prophecy, but now God makes clear that He will destroy that country and its people. God clearly states their sin and why He is doing this, but again, He doesn't seem excited and triumphant over this judgment; He weeps and wails with them, and He will "restore" them in the "latter days."

God speaks to city after city in the land of Moab which will be destroyed: (v.1) Nebo, Kiriathaim, Misgab, (v.2) Heshbon, Madmen, (v.3) Horonaim, (v.5) Luhith, (v.18) Dibon, (v.19) Aroer, (v.20) Arnon, (v.21) Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, (v.22) Beth-diblathaim, (v.23) Beth-gamul, Beth-meon, (v.24) Kerioth, Bozrah, (v.34) Elealeh, Jahaz, Zoar, Eglath-shelishiyah, Nimrim, and (v.36) Kir-heres. (Some of the key cities are repeated in the list with names following them perhaps of subdivisions or geographic regions within them.)

Why all this destruction?

1. "Because of your trust in your own achievements and treasures." (v.7)
2. Because Moab has been "proud," "boastful," "arrogant," "haughty," and "self-exalting." (vs. 26, 29, 42) This is heinous in God's sight. *God, forgive our pride; give us humble hearts that recognize that all we have comes from You and that we must trust in You for daily life. Woe to my own proud nation!*
3. They mocked and hurt God's people. (v.27)
4. Moab did not acknowledge the One True God. They worshiped Chemosh (v.7) and offered sacrifices on high places and burned incense to other gods (v.35). This also rankles the Most High God. Just as a rightful King would accuse a subject of treason if that subject were to hail someone else as king, so God has a right to be jealous when we worship anything besides Him. Our worship can seem very innocuous – desiring a pay raise, desiring to watch a video rather than pray, desiring recreation rather than to meet with other believers, disdaining compassion on despised people to maintain prestige in the eyes of colleagues, desiring a nice home and vehicle rather than choosing a lower standard of living in order to give generously…
5. Moab is also accused of being too much "at ease." (vs. 11-12) The image is given of wine that has been sitting still too long. Good wine must be moved from container to container to get rid of the stuff the settles out on the bottom and to make it better. There is something about changes in life that is good; it makes you grow. When things don't change, you stagnate. The most

beautiful streams are the fast-moving ones; when they stand still, the pollution and algae increase. Every good movie producer knows that if his plot is not dynamic and full of changes, it will be boring. God hopes that creating this calamity in Moab will change their hearts for the better so that they will cease to worship Chemosh and begin to worship Him (v.13). I believe this is going to have to happen to my country to turn our sluggish church into action and wake up all the fools who believe in other gods.

v.25 In the Bible, the "horn" symbolizes strength. God personifies the broken nation as a man with a broken arm.

What are we to do when we see a calamity like this come upon another nation?

- Mourn and give eulogy (v.17),
- Listen to the news (vs. 18-19),
- Wail and cry out that it has been destroyed (vs. 20, 31, 36),
- Moan for them (v.31),
- Weep (v.32).

This is the proper, godly response. How can WE mourn? I don't to have the physical capacity to cry easily myself, but,

- I can read news about nations I am not familiar with.
- I can recall what I know of calamities I have heard of on the news and imagine how it feels for people experiencing those tragedies and let that drive me toward specific prayers.
- I can remember the former glories of nations and be sad about their downfall.
- I can talk about these things with friends.
- I can fast.
- I can even make songs of lament. (The famous country music singer Johnny Cash even dressed all in black for a time as symbol of mourning over the brokenness of our world.)

One last thing in v.10: If God speaks to the pagan nation of Babylon, saying, "Cursed be the one who does the Lord's work (of killing Moabites) negligently," how much more so will He be displeased with His own children who do His kingdom work negligently!

# Chapter 49

**(vs. 1-6) Prophecy concerning Ammon**

The Ammonites were located just north of the Moabites on the East side of the Jordan River, and the Israelite tribe of Gad was located between Ammon and the Jordan River. This prophecy is in response to the Ammonites taking over the land of the tribe of Gad. Perhaps if there were no children in the tribe of Gad to settle land in the area, the Ammonites might have taken unused land for their own purposes of farming or grazing without a war, but they took over whole cities inhabited by Israelite families. Malcam (or Milcom – related to the Semitic word for "king") was the god that the Ammonites worshiped, and God the True and Living, is not happy about this. God, though Jeremiah, says that He will punish the Ammonite nation by destroying their city of Rabbah and setting other cities of theirs on fire. Furthermore He prophesies that Israel will take possession of the Ammonites' lands!

The phrase in v.3 is obscure. Heshbon was a Levitical city in the tribe of Gad – on the outer southeast edge. Ai (meaning "ruin") apparently was just that – a ruin – ever since Joshua's occupation of the Promised Land about a thousand years previous. Perhaps Heshbon was the main Israelite city captured by the Ammonites and this was a warning that, just as the Israelites had made a ruin of Ai, so they will make a ruin of Rabbah and other Ammonite cities.

Whatever the case, it is clear that Ammon has been offensive to God by:

- Worshiping Milcom,
- Taking over Israelite land wrongfully,
- Pride & boasting, and
- Trusting in their strength and wealth.

God has in mind to right this by:

- Destroying their land,
- Humbling them so that they no longer feel self-sufficient and boastful, and
- getting rid of their worship of Milcom.

God is just, and yet, I believe that if the people of Ammon had heeded this prophecy and conceded their captured land, wept and mourned as God commanded, and humbled themselves before Him, He would have called back His judgment, even as He had done with Nineveh two centuries previous when Jonah had prophesied a similar message. (Jonah is remembered for carrying a redemptive message cross-culturally, but Isaiah and Jeremiah did far more of that kind of ministry than Jonah did!)

It is interesting how God ends His message: Jehovah is not some tribal deity who cares only for Israelites. He also wants to be the God of the Ammonites! So He

will humble them, turn their hearts from their false god, and "restore their fortunes," and, we might add from a New Testament perspective that He will offer Ammonites salvation and blessing through Jesus! (Gen. 12:3, Matt. 24:14, Acts 2:9, Rev. 5:9)

**(vs. 7-22) Next, there is a prophecy concerning the people of Edom.**

Teman, Dedan, and Bozrah were all Edomite cities (although Teman was also the name of the mountain beside the city of that name, and it seems that Jeremiah may be referring to the mountain rather than the city by that name). Edom was the name given to Esau in Gen. 25:30, and these are his descendants who settled south of the Dead Sea (below the Moabites). It's a rugged, wild country, fit for someone like Esau, but the sides of the mountains had soil that could be farmed. The ancient ruins of the city of Petra are to be found there in what is now the modern-day country of Jordan.

There were several times throughout history when Edomites joined forces in war against Israel, starting in Numbers 20:20 when the Edomites fought against Moses as He was leading Israel into Canaan. They were defeated every time, but the last time was when they had helped Babylon take over Jerusalem. (Psalm 137 describes how cruel and ruthless they had been toward the Israelites on that occasion.) Babylon let the Edomites take Judean land, but they were later driven back, and even later, under the Maccabees, the Edomites were subdued completely. But it was an Edomite named Herod who gained the authority from the Roman emperor to be king of Judea and Jerusalem later on when Jesus was born.

The Edomites worshiped many idols and engaged in very degrading religious practices.

From this prophecy, we learn some things (cf. Lamentations 4:21-22):

- God is the ultimate authority; He rules over all things (v.19)
- These Edomites were arrogant (v16), and when you are arrogant, you become unwise, even as they were (v.7). Proud people don't seek good counsel, and they lack wisdom.
- God's judgment is thorough; He doesn't miss anything. He will bring EVERY deed to account (vs. 9-10).
- God will destroy this nation; His judgment is tough. All people must really take God seriously and be afraid of His punishment!
- God is still compassionate, and He has a special place in His heart for widows and orphans. (v.11) If they trust God, He will take care of them.

**(Vs. 23-27) Next is a prophecy concerning Damascus, the capitol city of Syria (a.k.a. Aram) to the north of Israel.**

This prophecy is short and does not seem to predict the total devastation which God pronounced on some of the other nations in this chapter. It is interesting that God chooses to restore some of these nations (Ammon and Elam) after punishing them, but doesn't make that comforting promise to Edom, Damascus, or Kedar. God is truly in control of world events.

It is obvious that something is going to badly frighten the Syrian people. Perhaps v.26 means that the fighting force will be demolished in a siege (vs. 25-27) and that the defensive wall of the city of Damascus will be destroyed. Perhaps this partial judgment is God's way of humbling them. They had conquered many nations in the past before Babylon rose to power, and v.25 says that they were "praised/renowned," so God's judgment seems to be one of humiliation – taking away their mighty army – rather than of total destruction. Even so, pride (self-worship) is bad news.

*Forgive me, Lord, of my pride!*

Why does God call Damascus His "joy" and "delight"? It's fascinating that God has a special place in His heart for Gentiles such as Syrians. Some 600 years later, Damascus became a major hub of Christianity!

*Lord, I hope You still have a special place in Your heart for Damascus. Most of them are now lost in Islam and need to know You for who you really are!*

**(vs. 28-33) Next is a prophecy concerning Kedar and Hazor.**

Kedar means dark (as in brown skin?) or perhaps "powerful." This is the name of the second son of Ishmael – and therefore of the Arab/Bedouin tribe which came from him. They were located in the desert between Arabia Petraea and Babylon. Ezekiel 27:21 and Isaiah 60:7 mention them as being shepherds. Isaiah prophesied its downfall in chapter 21 AND its restoration in chapter 60, particularly noting that they will praise Jehovah and offer acceptable sacrifices to Him (chapter 42). It is a wilderness land, and I get the impression that they were nomadic and that some of them raided caravans traversing the deserts between Egypt, Israel, and Babylon.

These Arabs, however, heard the Gospel at Pentecost in Acts 2:11, and Paul spent some time in Arabia after his conversion. Could this be a fulfillment of Isaiah's restoration prophecies?

Hazor is more difficult to pin down because the several references the Bible makes to them (Jos. 11:1-13; 12:19; 15:23-25; 19:36-37; Jdg. 4:2-17; 1 Sa. 12:9; 2 Sa. 13:23; 1 Ki. 9:15; 2 Ki. 15:29; Neh. 11:33) appear to be speaking of different cities. There is a clearly identified (and archaeologically-researched) city of Hazor in <u>North</u> Palestine, allotted to Naphtali's tribe, but there are several other Bible references that speak of a city (or cities) <u>South</u> of Palestine. With slightly different vowel pointing (Hazar), it is also used of some of the southern cities of Judah and of Yemen. Dr. Robert Young, in his concordance says that there may have been

three such cities by that name to the south and East of Judah. Joshua 15 mentions a Hazar that was a border city toward the south of Judah's tribal land heritage, and that is perhaps the same Hazor of which Jeremiah writes. The name means "enclosure" and may describe a village with a wall around it.

The word concerning Hazor is that Nebuchadnezzar will wipe these people out. From v.28, it appears that this was written after the fact. From this we learn that God is purposeful. There is nothing that happens in the world just by chance. We also learn that God uses people to fulfill His plans as a norm. In this case, it is an ungodly Babylonian named Nebuchadnezzar. To spread His kingdom, God works through His people (us!) to tell others about Him.

We further learn that God sometimes destroys people or nations for His own good reasons, and there's not much we can do but go along with it. I'm sure that Job, in the Old Testament and Christians in the 1992 Hurricane Andrew in Miami must have wondered why God was destroying things. It is not our place to ask. God is God, and He will do whatever He wants. It is not our end in life to be comfortable and have nice things; that is a sell-out to the world, and far too many Christian buy into this lie. No, God calls us to a life of servanthood and obedience to Him.

He does a lot of uncomfortable things to us to bring glory to Himself by maturing us and giving us opportunity to witness. We should welcome upheaval in our lives, because it is God's way of blessing us (not necessarily materially) and using us as a blessing to the world. When we get too complacent, He has to shake us up, and when He does, and we respond in maturity, other people will see and believe in God. But these people were probably not God's people, so there was no promise of restoration. They were objects of God's wrath, destroyed for the purpose of showing God's holiness, sovereignty, and perfect judgment. Their land was to be a desolation forever, only for wild animals to live in.

**(vs. 34-39) But Elam is another story.** God promises restoration to them (v.39), but not before a terrible judgment of calamity and dispersal. Who are the Elamites? They are descendants of Noah's grandson Elam, son of Shem. They settled in the area of Persia. Being an ancient family, it was probably pretty well established and large by Jeremiah's time.

Several other Biblical references are made to them:

- Genesis 14 speaks of a powerful king of Elam who conquered many cities in north and central Palestine. Abraham defeated him, however.
- Isaiah 21:2 establishes Elam as the Persians who joined with the Medes to overthrow Babylon, and also speaks of Elam in the overthrow of Jerusalem in 22:6.
- Ezekiel also speaks of Elam's downfall in 32:24.

- Daniel prophesies about Elam (Persia) in Chapter 8, that it will be shattered by Greece. He writes of the winds coming from the four corners of the earth in a manner similar to Jeremiah's statement in v.36.
- Acts 2:9 mentions that Elamites heard the Gospel at Pentecost too!

This prophesy must have been made before they took over the Babylonian Empire. Perhaps it was a warning not to get proud and think that their overthrow of Babylon could give them security. It showed the sovereignty of God in controlling nations, allowing them to rise and fall. God is in control.

If I remember correctly, these Persians weren't quite so pagan as many others. They have observed a dualistic religion where they worship a god of good (Ahura Mazda) who is pretty similar to the true and living God except that they believe that He shares His power with an equally-powerful bad god, so they didn't have it quite right. Their fathers were not faithful in teaching their children about the God of Elam's grandfather Noah. God could not tolerate even this partial deviation from the truth. He must show that He is sovereign over their bad god and over their human might. God's throne is set over all kings (v.38), and every person in authority who does not recognize God as their ultimate authority will be destroyed – maybe not immediately, for it took many years before this prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled against the Persians, but it <u>was</u> eventually fulfilled, and it <u>is</u> fulfilled in eternity.

But, for His own purposes, and out of His grace, God will restore Persia. In historical hindsight, I can see that, even though Babylon has been reduced to ruins and remained a ruin for millennia, God has allowed civilizations to flourish still in that part of the world in what we call Iraq and Iran, although these countries have been sorely vexed in the Modern age by the falsehoods and oppression of Islam. Nevertheless, Christianity has been a strong and growing movement in Iran, so perhaps that is part of the future renewal of Elam prophesied by Jeremiah.

# Chapters 50 & 51

God gave Jeremiah this prophecy to Babylon about its destruction even as Babylon was in its prime, deporting its first captives from Judah. Jeremiah (or more likely Baruch) wrote it down and gave it to Seraiah to read out loud in Babylon. Seraiah was an influential man, the chief supply officer for the Israelite army – influential enough for Nebuchadnezzar to take him off with King Zedekiah in the first deportation (51:59 & 63).

- v.2 This prophecy is not just for Babylon or Israel, but for <u>all</u> nations – this is a part of God's global plan to win all nations to Himself (cf. v.46).
- "Do not conceal it." Why do we Christians conceal our faith? We should be openly declaring it before our nation and others.
  *God, forgive me for concealing You so much. Please loose my tongue and let me have opportunities to witness.*
- Babylon will be overthrown by the northern nations of Media (50:3, 9, 41, and 51:11, 27 & 28) at an unexpected time (50:24 & 44, and 51:39 & 57). History proves that this is indeed what happened.

WHY will Babylon be destroyed?

1. The thing at the top of the list is idol worship (50:2 & 38, and 51:17-18 & 44-52). The worship of the false gods Bel and Marduk are the main things God found offensive in Babylon.
2. The next reason on the list is vengeance for the destruction of God's temple and people (50:7, 15, 17-18, 28, 33-34 and 51:5-11, 24, 34-36, 49).
3. And then pride in themselves (50:11, 29, 32, 36, and 51:13, 17, & 53).

Four times this prophecy speaks of God using a "destroyer" (51:1, 48, 53, & 56). Verses 1 and 56 seem very much like God has summoned an evil spirit named "destruction." God is lord over the entire natural and supernatural world, and He even uses demons to His own purposes – not that God is an instigator of evil, but He allows the Evil One to work unhindered at times in order to fulfill His own good purposes.

This prophecy came true many years later while the Babylonians/Meriathaim/Pekod/Chaldeans/Nebuchadnezzar/Sheshak/Ceb-kamai were holding a great feast and were drunk, and the alliance of Median and Persian nations crept in through passageways and slaughtered the Babylonians in their drunken stupor.

God also makes a big deal in this prophecy about the skills the insurgents had with bow and arrow, and indeed the Achaemenids who overthrew Babylon were famous for their tactical developments and skill in archery.

Going back to the three reasons God is destroying Babylon, are these not the three reasons God destroys every nation? Let every nation beware of idol-worship, pride,

and persecuting the church of God! Even my nation (which was founded on Christian principles) will be due for judgment as soon as they start killing Christians – it is already proud and idolatrous.

*Dear God, let me worship only You. There is no other thing or person in the world worth living for. Besides that, You really are the greatest person in the universe! Your power, wisdom, love, and mercy are greater than anyone or anything else could possibly be! Lord, forgive us for trading cheap, temporary, selfish pleasures for Your eternal glory.*

1. IDOLATRY: Worship is so much more than bowing down in front of something. It permeates the songs we sing, the things we think about, the amount of time we spend on activities, and the amount of money we invest in things.

- If you give less to God than you give to the civil government or to your own entertainment, that is an indicator that you are probably not a worshiper of God but rather of those things.
- If you spend most of your free thoughts and time on a sport, food, movies, or relationships, then that is your act of worship to that idol/god.
- If the majority of the songs you sing or listen to are about falling in love, then human love is your god.

*But Jesus, are You not much more worth singing about, giving to, thinking about, and spending time obeying? O God, help me to make You fully God in my life!*

2. MISTREATMENT OF GOD's PEOPLE: These chapters make it real clear how God feels about the destruction of God's people. He gets seriously upset when His children are attacked. He plans out His vengeance, and He thoroughly punishes those who hurt His people! Persecution of the saints has always been a theme of church history, and it is still happening all over the world now – even increasingly in my own "Christian" country.

*God, my Christian brethren in other countries are being killed every day for their faith and I hardly every think about it. Please give me Your heart of compassion and concern for them when I pray. Let me always remember (and be given peace by) these chapters when I myself am persecuted and when I see others being persecuted. You are a God of vengeance, and You will repay wicked men for their deeds, so I need not be bitter and vengeful myself.*

By due process of law they can and should be bought to human judgment, but should not be hated, but rather pitied and loved because God's "posse in the sky is surely coming down[4]."

3. PRIDE: This sin is hard to overcome, because the prouder we are, the blinder we are to it. If you don't think you are proud, or if you know that you are proud but

4 From the chorus of Terry Scott Taylor's song "Posse in the Sky" recorded on the Daniel Amos album *Shotgun Angel*.

don’t feel like its’ a big deal, then you have a problem! There is nothing worth being proud of except Jehovah-God, because God is really greater than anything in the universe, and if anything else makes you proud, it will get snuffed way just like the glory of Babylon. God loves humility. Pride is a form of idolatry because it is a worship of yourself or your assets instead of the true and living God. What’s more, when you are proud, you drive people away from you because pride makes you obnoxious – not only to God but to everybody else as well.

It is so easy to become proud of our looks, our possessions, our strength, our family, anything, but pride denies the fact that everything we are and have comes from God. What if we were as proud and boastful about God as we are about other things? What waves we Christians would make; how awesome it would be to see God’s kingdom expand!

*Lord, give me an attitude and desire and opportunities to boast about You. And give me a humble heart that is aware of my great sin against You and of my unworthiness to be called Your son or to be blessed with all the blessings You have given me. Let me receive criticism graciously and thankfully.*

God’s judgment on Babylon is intense. They will be utterly destroyed – slaughtered and towns burned – and Babylon will remain a ruin forever (and so it is to this day).

It is interesting to note parallels with other prophecies – proof that they all came from one source – God!

- Jer. 51:6-9 reads very much like Revelation 17 & 18
- Phrases in Jer. 51:58 are also found in Habakkuk 2:13

The people of Babylon and their captives worked so hard to build their great walls, palaces, and temples, only for them to get knocked down and burned in the end. They “worked for nothing and exhausted themselves for fire” as Habakkuk put it. They invested in the wrong thing; their god was a bad investment. What are we investing in? Will our investments reap eternal benefits in our family and ministry or will they be destroyed like Babylon’s walls?

*It must have taken quite some pluck for Seraiah to read this in Babylon! Give us that kind of courage today!*

# Chapter 52

This chapter goes back in time to review in detail the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its inhabitants. It is also a fitting preface to the book of Lamentations.

Zedekiah, second-to-last Judean king did something to rankle the Babylonian emperor who had made him puppet-king, so Nebuchadnezzar himself came down with his army to crush the Judeans once and for all. They laid siege to Jerusalem for something like a year and a half.

It only took them four months (or was it 6? – months 10 through 12 and on to month 4?) to run out of food. The Judeans may not have been used to storing much food due to the long growing season there. But if you take refuge in a city that takes a year and a half to conquer, you'd better have a year and a half worth of food or there's no point to it. And money won't do you any good when what you need is food!

It is also important that a ruler (or anyone, for that matter) not have a rebellious spirit. Also, Jerusalem's fighting men and king were wimps. Rather than stand and die defending their own people like good kings and nobles should, they fled at the first possibility of escape. (I'm afraid we have too many leaders like that in our land right now, too!) They got caught and slaughtered anyway. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons so that there could be no heirs left to claim the Judean throne, then he had Zedekiah blinded and thrown into prison.

The Chaldeans (and the others mustered with them – such as the Edomites), burned every important house and building and looted the city, taking the columns and even the utensils from the temple. They broke down the wall around the city so that it would be indefensible in the future. This account does not speak of wide-spread slaughter, but of a selective execution of the 74 most-influential men in the city – so that they would not have leaders to incite another rebellion. But the parallel accounts (Jer. 39, 2 Kings 25 - an exact copy of Jer. 52, and Lamentations, 2 Chron. 36, & Psalm 137) contain further details that look pretty nasty: soldiers broke into the city and found thousands of starving people, not many of which were able to put up a fight, so they stalked throughout the city killing people, then they chained up over 3,000 of them and carried them as slaves back to Babylon. And they kept coming back every so many years to take more slaves.

When I think of the nation of Israel, I think of a well-populated land – the two million souls that entered Canaan under Joshua had been proliferating for a thousand years by now, so there must have been a vast population! I am surprised that more people weren't taken captive. Perhaps armies were smaller than they are today (and this was before big transport trucks had been invented) so perhaps that was all the captives that Nebuchadnezzar's army could manage. Still, a total of

4,600 exiles is only a tiny fraction of what the total population of Judah had been. A massive number must have been slaughtered, and who knows how many of the poorest of the poor were left to tend the land.

But everyone who was there was profoundly impacted by what happened. If I were there, it would have left an indelible impression on me: God's judgment on His people was devastating. It stands as a warning to us all to obey God and take hold of the remedies for sin He provides because if we don't, His judgment will be terrible.

# LAMENTATIONS Chapter 1

Lamentations was written by Jeremiah around the fall of Jerusalem when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered it. As we learned in the book of Jeremiah, the proper thing to do in a calamity is to mourn. Jeremiah is a godly man, and he is doing the right thing in these Lamentations. Each chapter is a separate "psalm," and several of them are acrostic poems, starting each line with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. For Jeremiah to take this kind of trouble to write it a poetry means that he intended other people to learn it and join in these songs of mourning.

It appears that Chapters 2 and 4 were written right after (or at the end of) the siege and capture of Jerusalem, whereas chapters 1 & 5 seem to have been written some time afterward. Chapter 3 seems to have been written during the siege while Jeremiah was still in Jerusalem – around the time that he was imprisoned in the well and subsequently in the guard house. This creates the following chiasm which focuses on the distress of the siege at the center:

Chapter 1 – Long after the siege
Chapter 2 – Immediately after the siege
**Chapter 3 – During the siege**
Chapter 4 – Immediately after the siege
Chapter 5 – Long after the siege

Jeremiah makes it clear that this calamity has come because of the sins of Israel and (especially from 2:17) that God is the One behind all that is happening. God is punishing Israel; it was not just an unfortunate happenstance. God had even planned it out long ago to be the consequence of Israel's sin.

Israel's sins are listed as follows:

- v.9 – Uncleanness in her skirts and not considering the future.
- v.18 – Rebellion against God's commands. (Notice the missionary implications of this verse: God's punishment of Israel results in other nations hearing of God's righteousness!)
- v.19 – Several phrases in Chapter 1 speak of Israel's friends and lovers which turn against her. God is the only One Who will be totally faithful. When we put our trust and investments in anyone else, they will fail us. Not to say we should be loners, but that our trust should be in God first.
- v.19 – The priests and elders were going hungry because tithes were not being paid. But, rather than trust God's provision, those priests went after food in their own strength. This is bad news for a community of God's people.

vs. 21-22 It is proper to ask God to punish wicked men. Vengeance is His. However, we should not damn them ourselves, because we always have the hope that perhaps they may be saved, and we can be agents through whom they hear of God’s salvation.

# LAMENTATIONS Chapter 2

v.2 The Chaldeans threw down “all the other fortified cities of Judah” before coming to Jerusalem.

v.6 & 9 How unnerving to Jeremiah who loved God to see that the temple was destroyed, the law and the feasts would be no longer, and that God isn’t even giving the prophets visions any more. What a terrible thing it is for God to forsake His people, but He does it out of justice. Will my country also become this spiritually hopeless? In many ways it already has.

vs.13-14 “Who can heal you?” This is still a prophetic message designed to bring people to repentance. It is never too late to repent, and if the people in Jerusalem had repented then, even then they might not have suffered a 70-year exile, even as Nineveh did not suffer the destruction Jonah prophesied for it. Who can heal? God alone!

v.14 – More sins: Prophets have been false, giving “false and foolish visions,” and forsaking their duty to expose the sin of God’s people.

v.20 – The conditions of Jerusalem during the siege were so severe that people were eating their own children and eating dung to escape starvation.

# LAMENTATIONS Chapter 3

vs. 1-18 & 52-65 really sound like a description of the well into which Jeremiah was thrown. Perhaps this was symbolic of Judah's captivity, but it sounds very much like what Jeremiah himself experienced.

When a prophet truly exercises his calling, he will make even the most Godly people uncomfortable, and if a true prophet is in the midst of wicked people, he will inevitably face the kind of ugly treatment Jeremiah received. Am I willing to go through this out of obedience to my God?

*O God, let me be true to You and courageous to do Your will!*

Notice how much like the Psalms this is. Jeremiah is not indicting those filthy rotten priests and princes of Jerusalem; he blames it all on God ("He has turned against me…"). No matter what happens, we must have Jeremiah's insight to look beyond the people who are hurting us to the sovereign God Who has arranged everything. Complaining to God about old so-and-so is not what David or Jeremiah did in their psalms; instead they brought their case straight to God and told Him how it felt to be under His discipline.

vs.21-24 What is Jeremiah's cause for hope? Is it that he has received punishment and is humble? Maybe the verse should end with a colon instead: "I have hope: Jehovah is kind, merciful, and faithful." God's mercy is our only hope.

In the midst of a war where people are getting their guts torn out by enemy swords, a siege where women are so hungry they throw their crying baby into the oven and then cut him up to eat, an evil religious and political regime where everyone in every place of power and authority is corrupt – lying and fighting for power, and turning a blind eye when innocent men are tortured without cause, in the midst of a rebellious people who constantly worship idols and make fun of Jeremiah every time he got up to speak, in Jeremiah's circumstances – hated by everyone, trapped in a dank well and being starved to death, HOW COULD THERE BE CAUSE FOR HOPE?

God is greater! God is the ultimate sovereign of the universe, and He is kind, merciful, and faithful. Jeremiah knows that God will discipline, but not destroy His own people. He knows that God has mercy on everyone who cries out to Him in repentance over sin and in faith for salvation; he knows that mercy is new every morning because every day we offend God, no matter how good we are.

Jehovah is faithful; He never will renig on any of His promises. He is always conscious of you; You never leave His mind. And when you become His child, you can count on Him to take care of you always and use you to glorify His name on the earth. Praise God!!!

*We are incorrigible sinners; we do not deserve Your mercy, but, O Lord, how wonderful it is! I praise You that You are merciful - and that not just once, but, incredibly, over and over every day! Jehovah, You are my portion, my God. I will hope in You!*

vs. 25-31 This hoping in the Lord takes patience. God does not often act immediately on our behalf to destroy all who oppress us. We should not expect that. But God is good to those who wait on Him. It is good to hope and wait for God to deliver us. The waiting that Jeremiah endured for Messiah is over now; Messiah Jesus has come! The waiting Jeremiah did for the deliverance of Israel and Judah was not fulfilled in his lifetime, but it surely came about. Nowadays we wait for deliverance from a corrupt civil government, we hope for the renewal of the church, and we hope and wait for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. That hoping is not a "maybe;" it is a sure hope that will not be disappointed , even if it is not fulfilled in our lifetime.

*Lord, You have been very good to me! For Your goodness, kindness, mercy, and faithfulness I praise You! Please give me zeal and eagerness in my hope for Your return. Let it be foremost on my mind that I not forget my great hope!*

v.27 What is the "yoke" that Jeremiah says is good for youths to bear? Perhaps it is easier to undergo hard times when you are young. I'm sure my 1-year-old son doesn't realize the sacrifices we make as much as my wife and I realize them. It is also good for young people to be taught to wait patiently on the Lord. This does not come naturally, and the earlier it is learned, the better!

vs. 28-32 What's it like to wait on the Lord? It isn't easy! It takes a humble heart, a sure hope, and a great patience. These are things the Holy Spirit alone can give us. We may face isolation, humiliation, and physical abuse, but if we have our hope in God, it is endurable, and He will enable us to wait. We can't totally understand the ways of the Lord, but somehow it is good when He give us grief (cf. James 1 and 1 Peter 1). But if you are a child of God, He will not punish you forever. Whether for our sin He disciplines us (like the capture and exile of Israel and Judah was) or for some other reason (like Job), God knows how much we can take, and, like a good father, He knows how hard to discipline us so that it hurts enough to change us but not so much it damages us. He is reasonable and careful with us and will stop before it is too much, and He will restore us to His blessing like a good father.

v.32 Can you imagine how much kindness God has in Him? Would it be possible even to begin estimating its vastness? Jeremiah says that God will "have pity according to the multitude of His kindnesses." Wow!

v.33 God does not discipline out of anger. His afflictions upon His children are reasoned, planned, and controlled. He does not give so much discipline as to grieve His child. Fathers on earth, take notes from how our Heavenly Father disciplines us!

vs. 34-39 God is just and fair, no matter how unjust and unfair things seem to be to us. He will never crush everyone who is a prisoner. He will never leave a person unpunished for sin; He does not pervert justice. There's no one who can say or do anything that God doesn't know about or allow! God can do only good and never evil. We deserve much more punishment than we receive because we have sinned so much against God. We should never complain about the discipline of the Lord.

Lord, I am in a different circumstance of waiting from that which Jeremiah was experiencing, but I am dealing with the same hoping and waiting. In the fund-raising process, I am hoping and waiting for You to provide the support I need to serve in ministry with Caleb Project. Help me, Lord, to wait patiently, humbly, and in confidence of the fulfillment of that hope. Help me, like Jeremiah in vs. 55-58 to look back at the past where You have worked on my behalf and remember Your faithfulnesses in the past and look forward to Your deliverance!

# LAMENTATIONS Chapters 4-5

4:13 What a great responsibility is placed on the prophets and priests! Christian leaders should know the most about God and should be setting an example before God's people. When a church leader sins, it is in some ways more serious than if a regular man sins, because leaders should know better and should be an example to others.

4:17 Depending on other nations to help your nation is not good. (This would be quite a game-changer if applied to foreign policy today!)

4:21 More evidence that Edomites joined the Chaldeans in the destruction of Jerusalem. Sounds like drunkenness and sexual profligacy were high on the Edomite mind. Through Jeremiah here (and Habakkuk 2:15-16), God promised retribution and justice.

5:14 It seems good that old people stay in sight of the rest of the populace rather than being tucked away into nursing homes. It is good for us to go to them for counsel. It is also good for young men to learn to sing!

5:19-21 *God, I praise You that You will always be the God Most High through all time and beyond time! Dear God, please do return my people to You and renew us!*